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## **Expanding the comfort zones: Divergent practices of host and international university students**

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## **Expanding the comfort zones: Divergent practices of host and international university students**

Host and international students evolve side-by side within the expanding internationalization of higher education. This study takes the complementary perspective of analysing 1,900 host and international students' experiences at a high-ranking research university in France. We analyse and compare the mobility, language practices and practices related to university life of these two populations interacting within a common higher education setting. Despite common needs of language skills for professional needs, our results demonstrate significant differences in their declared concerns and practices, suggesting that each population remains largely within their diverging "comfort zones". We find a lack of social interaction between host and international students, producing a two-way deficit, where many host students miss an opportunity to benefit from practicing foreign languages and discovering new socio-cultural perspectives, while many international students miss an opportunity for local social and institutional support, known to reduce stress. We conclude with suggestions for adapting university policies to remedy this deficiency.

Keywords: academic mobility; internationalisation, France; language practices, university life

### **Introduction**

Linked to the expanding phenomenon of internationalization, universities implement policies and student services aimed at promoting mobility, international perspectives, language skills and cross-cultural understanding (Lilley, Barker, & Harris, 2015). In Europe, funded programmes, such as Erasmus, or policy recommendations, such as those expressed in the foreign policy tool known as the *Bologna Declaration* of 1999 (Zahavi & Friedman, 2019) have largely contributed to international exchanges and a harmonization facilitating international study (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency, 2016; Teichler, 2009). Although international exchanges are integrated into competitive international rankings, these ranking methods do not always correspond to national academic traditions, including the range of accounting for the

diverse range of patterns students achieve academic mobility (Bourdon, 2015).

Furthermore, there are no commonly held goals or benchmarks to evaluate results for the multitude of international exchanges (Altbach & Teichler, 2001).

Robson (2011) considers that achieving an ‘internationalized’ institution requires a transformative agenda. Within this dynamic and often ambiguous context, administrators, faculty, staff, and other stakeholders are wise to be aware of the needs and practices of international and host students in order to improve policies and services (Ammigan and Laws, 2018; Fernex, de Vries & Lima, 2017; Owens & Loomes, 2010; Robson, Almeida, & Schartner, 2018; Trahar, 2013). Research is a starting block of quality programmes and support in this domain:

Quality in international programs is dependent on the implementation of learning strategies and processes supported by research, and facilitated by experienced staff. It is also dependent upon recognition by the sponsoring institutions of adequate levels of resourcing required to support not only best practice by the educators involved, but also to ensure the best outcomes for students who participate. (McAllister, Whiteford, Hill, Thomas, & Fitzgerald, 2006, p. 378-379).

Although much research has targeted international students within English-speaking countries, such as Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom, other countries participate in this international arena, with varying patterns of participation. France, for example, traditionally has a limited outward mobility, but attracts many foreign students thanks to inviting policies and cutting-edge education and research (Admit Project Team, 2002). It is noteworthy that France is the third most popular country after Spain and Germany for study abroad among European students (European Commission of Education and Culture, 2012). However, little empirical research on student mobility in France has been conducted. Thus, this study fills an important gap in the literature by examining a range of host and international (diploma-mobility and

credit-mobility) student practices in a mainly non-English speaking, French higher education setting.

Through a student survey conducted in a high-ranking French university, we analyse the declarations related to three spheres:

- (1) Expectations related to mobility,
- (2) Language practices at home, at university and during extra-curricular activities,
- (3) Extra-curricular and university life practices.

Our results demonstrate significant differences in the host and international students' expectations and practices, suggesting that they remain within their own 'comfort zone'. Our hypothesis is that these differences of language, social, and university life practices are sufficient to impeding deep interaction between the two populations. After modelling the phenomenon of host and international student interaction and analysing the student responses to a survey, we conclude with some suggestions for enhancing a productive 'internationalization' of the university environment.

### **Student mobility**

There are many obstacles to student mobility. According to Hauschildt, Gwosć, Netz and Mishra (2015), many of these obstacles are shared by European students seeking temporary enrolment abroad, notably the perceived cost (63% for European students, 58% for French seeking enrolment abroad) and homesickness (47% for European, 38% for French), followed by the language barrier (29% for European, 41% for French), the recognition of the credits back home (22% for European, 10% for French) and the lack of information (22% for European, 23% for French). Mirroring these obstacles, a survey in five New Zealand universities highlights the crucial lack of

information concerning options, funding and even the benefits of mobility (Doyle, Gendall, Meyer, Hoek, Tait, McKenzie, & Loorparg, 2010). However, in Europe, 68% of outgoing students are satisfied with the academic mobility support services of their home university (European Commission of Education and Culture, 2012).

Gender may also be a factor impacting patterns of student mobility worldwide as a large body of research shows that the many personal and social variables affecting women's pursuit of higher education – including potential earning power, workforce development, fertility behavior and family arrangements, and shifts of beliefs and values – continue to impact access to higher education, notably for persons of lower economic levels (Parvazian, Gill, & Chiera 2017). In Europe, in 1995, only 43% of international students within the 12 primary European countries were women (Jallade, Gordon, & LeBeau (1996) as cited in Ballatore, 2010). More recently in France, gender does not appear to be a factor contributing to student mobility within the Erasmus programme, but may be a factor for in-coming students from non-European countries (Ballatore, 2010). Confirming this, in their study of the consequential number of Moroccan students aspiring a mobility to France, Bereni and Rubi (2015) found that 60% of the candidates are men, despite an equal amount of women as men obtaining a secondary school diploma allowing them to apply for university.

Language practices are context-bound and remain one of numerous factors influencing student mobility and integration within the host establishment. In his study of 26 Irish host undergraduate students, Dunne (2009) found that several factors, including language, approach to the higher education experience and age, result in host students differentiating themselves from international students. For international students, integration may be enhanced by the capacity to communicate orally with others, as a high score on the speaking section of the TOEFL was negatively correlated

with acculturative stress, i.e. stress resulting from adapting to another culture (Smiljanic, 2017).

Integration depends on a multitude of factors. Findlay, King, Smith, Geddes and Skeldon (2012), surveying 1,400 final-year international pupils in England and 560 British students enrolled for study abroad, found that socio-economic factors influence mobility practices, but also students' awareness 'not only of how education produced social difference but of the way that the place of study had a critical differentiating influence' (p. 125). Similarly, in her qualitative study of 38 international students in the UK, Beech (2018) found that homophilious friendships are often quite deliberate and strategic on the part of international students, giving them political power within institutions, as well as providing a means of social support and acting as a surrogate family when they are living away from home (p. 19).

### ***Advantages of host-international student interactions***

In their survey of alumni, Luo and Jameison-Drake (2013) found that host students who interacted often with international students declared greater skill development in a range of areas. They note 'the important role institutions have in leveraging greater international diversity', notably through the implementation of academic and extracurricular activities (p. 96). In parallel, Defrays and Meunier (2012) warn against the standardization of international programmes that may physically bring together students and teachers from different nationalities, but without bringing about actual interaction and reciprocal learning among the populations, thereby often confirming preexisting stereotypes. To counter this phenomenon, Takimoto Amos and Rehorst (2018) found in their experimental class of teacher candidates and Japanese students in the United States that recasting the power balance and encouraging native English

speakers to be more attentive of the reception of their speech patterns helps to create more meaningful dialogue between the two populations.

Several studies have confirmed the link between the social integration of international students and the level of stress. 'Social connectedness and social support networks contributed to 18.3% of the variance [of acculturative stress,] demonstrating that international students who felt more socially connected and were more satisfied with their social network experienced less acculturative stress' (Yeh & Inose, 2003: 22-23). Confirming this, in their study of Vietnamese and first-year French students transitioning to a French university, Brisset, Safdarb, Rees Lewis and Sabatier (2010) (2010) found that those who 'reported high satisfaction with their in-group social support tended to report high host-national identification'. These authors concluded that the identification to one's original culture, rather than its abandonment to adopt that of the host culture, is desirable for acculturating individuals and groups (p. 423). Sullivan and Kashubeck-West's (2015) survey of undergraduate and graduate international students in the United States concluded that those with broader social networks and who adopted an integration approach declared less acculturative stress. Lilley et al. (2015) found that students on mobility expressed the need to better integrate through volunteering and socialization with host students outside of the classroom, so as to avoid staying only with co-nationals (p. 234-235). For this social enhancement, participating in university athletics may contribute to student integration as supported by Li and Zizzi's (2018) ethnological study of two women on academic mobility in the United States.

### ***Policy impact***

Other studies have examined the university atmosphere, which may be influenced by university policy. Among undergraduate students at nine research

universities in the United States, Horne, Lin, Anson and Jacobson (2018) found that a significant number of their student survey participants (3,000 on mobility and 55,000 host) declared that they feel that both a 'climate for diversity and respect' and of 'social belonging' are lacking. In their study of 761 international students enrolled at a US research university, Glass and Gesing (2018) conclude that higher education institutions would benefit from identifying places and contexts that are conducive to developing social capital, thereby possibly decreasing international students' acculturative stress, while increasing their attachment to the institution and improving their job-seeking behaviors. Universities may implement conditions for direct and repeated meetings between host and international students, as, for example, conversation partner programmes, although this type of programme requires sustained involvement (Aaron, Cedeño, Gareis, Kumar, & Swaminathan, 2018).

### ***Comfort zone***

Creating a space for unifying students is not always a straightforward task. In her study of Canadian students on short-term mobility in the global South, the everyday experience of living abroad is felt as both exotic and as a source of belonging within a new environment and culture, thereby allowing students to extend their 'comfort zone' (Prazeres, 2017, p. 916). As Freire and Macedo (1995) highlight, educators may 'mechanistically reduce the emological relationship of dialogue to a vacuous, feel-good comfort zone' (p. 394), whereby privileged individuals have more leverage to negotiate that zone. They continue:

A very first step [to find unity in diversity] is to understand the nature of multicultural coexistence so as to minimize the glaring ignorance of the cultural other. Part of this understanding implies a thorough understanding of the history that engenders these cultural differences. We need to understand that: a) there are intercultural differences that exist due to the presence of such factors as class, race,



and gender and, as an extension of these, you have national differences; and b) these differences generate ideologies that, on the one hand, support discriminatory practices and, on the other hand, create resistance. (Freire & Macedo, 1995, p. 394-395).

Thus, bringing together student of different origins cannot be reduced to a mechanical movement of students. These students bring with them a long heritage of cultural differences and ensuing ideologies that impede a “comfortable” cohesion. The notion of comfort is also evoked by Pandit (2009), who discusses the need for a supportive environment to ensure meaningful student interaction:

Thus, by focusing solely on assimilating international students and training them to be ambassadors of American culture, we have tended to overlook the wealth of global knowledge and connections these students bring to our campuses. A critical first step is to ensure that there is meaningful interaction between host and international students. In the absence of proactive efforts to create an environment for such exchanges, international students often find it comfortable to remain within co-ethnic networks (Pandit, 2009, p. 651).

Likewise, in their constructivist-interpretive based survey of 21 European and Australian undergraduate students on mobility and also 25 professional informants on academic mobility, Lilley et al. (2015) concluded that ‘development starts with [international students’] leaving the comfort zone, thinking critically about themselves and others, and engaging beyond their immediate circle’ (p. 231). They identified a myriad of factors that characterise leaving the comfort zone; displacement from the comfort zone: separation from family and friends, language difficulties, cultural differences, engagement with different others, saving yourself in new or different situations, coping, interpersonal conflict, and differences in university structure and support and approaches to learning, (p. 233). These factors of displacement facilitated personal change:

To informants and students, *stepping out of the comfort zone* was recognized as the fundamental facilitator of “change,” and it applied to any disorienting situation that creates a sense of uncertainty, personal discomfort, or dilemma. Students emphasized how coping with these situations allowed them to think, reflect, and grow personally and intellectually. (Lilley et al., 2015, p. 233)

Although these disorienting experiences occurring ‘*out of the comfort zone*’ were not easy to cope with, overcoming them led to a broadening of international students’ horizons.

### **The study**

The present study draws upon a university-wide survey of all enrolled students aimed at evaluating academic mobility, language practices and extra-curricular social practices on or off campus. It was conducted in consultation with the governing body and an internal report was also established to address local policy issues (Abou Haidar et al., 2017). The particularly rich raw data offer insight into generalizable student opinions and practices, which are developed in this article.

### ***Methods of data collection and analysis***

Following ethics approval based upon informed consent procedures, 1,900 students responded to a fully anonymous on-line survey following an e-mail from the Vice-President of Academic Affairs encouraging them to participate in the survey and highlighting its anonymous and voluntary nature. The email was sent to the entire list of enrolled students composed of over 40,000 undergraduate and graduate students. Although the 4.8% response rate may appear low when compared to the total amount of officially enrolled students, the participants represent the diversity of the general student population at the university and nationally, as well as offering a large pool of student declarations.

From October 2016 to February 2017, the participants could choose between an otherwise identical English or French version and did not receive any financial or academic incentive. No student names or identifying data were collected by the on-line survey platform. After collection, twenty responses were discarded because the student ticked a written response indicating that they did not want their data to be included in the study. This question was integrated at the end of the study for ethical reasons, allowing the student full decisional power of participation.

The platform Sphinx (Moscarola & Migaux, n.d.) was used to collect data. The survey consisted of a total of 19 multiple-choice or short-answer questions and could be completed using either a personal computer, tablet or cell phone. The questionnaire automatically adapted to student answers, thus certain questions, such as regarding details of a previous experience of mobility, were only displayed to students having indicated such an experience in a previous question. Many students declared they were pleased with the university's interest in their feedback, while one student sent an email to an available contact in order to verify that the survey was anonymous.

## **Participants**

The 1900 participants were from all levels of study and disciplinary degree programmes, including 276 students with the administrative status of a diploma-mobility or a credit-mobility student, as shown in Table 1. Thus, approximately half the students were undergraduate students (51.4%). In addition, approximately half were pursuing studies in the Natural Sciences or Engineering. However, other degree levels and disciplines are also well represented in this study. This data follows a national gendered trend in France of fewer male students within the disciplines of Languages and Literatures, for example, Kabla-Langlois (2015) found only 29.9% of male students in these fields for both undergraduate and graduate studies.

	Survey population	Percentage female
Undergraduate	51.4%	73.9%
Master's degree	22.7%	68.0%
Doctoral	16.5%	46.2%
Continuing Education	9.4%	47.7%
Nat. Sciences/Engineering	49.7%	49.1%
Humanities	29.6%	78.5%
Languages/literatures	20.7%	82.6%

Table 1: Survey population by level, discipline and gender

Women are over-represented among host students (66.6%), but international women represent only 49.0% of the international students, which is a significant difference ( $p = 0.009$ ) according to a two-tailed Fisher's exact test, used throughout the study as it accommodates for the smaller number of international students. This relative reduced number of female international students, compared to host students, reflects the persistent difficulties for women in higher education as discussed *supra*.

Just over 20% of the participants declared an international origin, as 78.9% of participants declared being from France, followed by Europe (excluding France) (5.9%), Asia (4.2%), the Americas (3.8%), the Maghreb and the Middle East (3.7%) and sub-Saharan Africa (1.7%). Students from Asia, Latin America and the Middle East were more prevalent in the Natural and Physical sciences. These figures encompass personal geographical trajectories, rather than official institutional status, as some international students may be enrolled outside of institutional exchange programs.

### **Data analysis and discussion**

This study examines the 'comfort zone' of host and international students as related to the internationalization of university life. We adopt the *Delphi Panel's* revised version of Knight's definition (2003, p. 2 as cited in Knight, 2004, p. 11) of internationalization as:

the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society. (De Wit et al., 2015. 33).

This definition attempts to envisage *internationalization* as a broader means to enhance equality and quality that is not limited to a limited elite mobile student population.

Thus, we examine the declarations of three main indicators: apprehensions or obstacles related to academic mobility, language needs and practices, the social and academic practices related to university life. These three indicators allow us to examine the influences and overlap of host and international interaction as displayed in Figure 1.

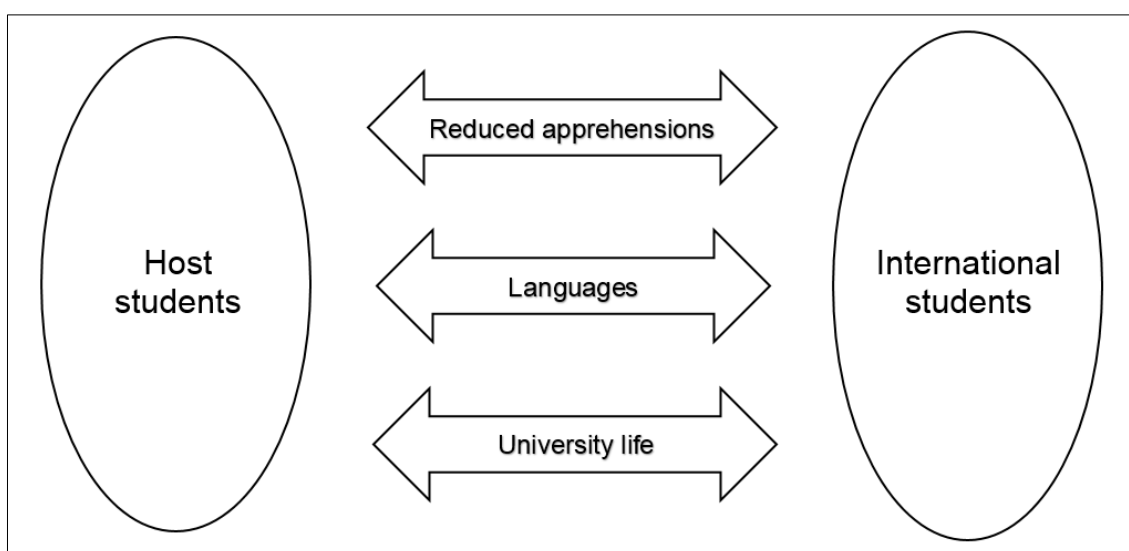


Figure 1: Influences on host-international student interactions

### ***Academic mobility***

There are many reasons for students to attend a given university, but for all levels of study, the primary motivation for attending this specific university was the content of the degree program (71.9%), particularly in Master's degree programs (80.4%). Thus, both host and international students share a common goal of pursuing a high-quality education in the chosen domain. However, the second motivation for

attending this particular university is the possibility of studying in proximity to their home (42.4%), which is especially true for undergraduate students (49.6%). In other words, access to the security, resources and comfort associated with family and corresponding to a lack of mobility, is a factor for a large percentage of the student population.

To evaluate the possible sources of stress related to the financial, contextual and psychological challenges typical of academic mobility, international students ( $n = 276$ ) and host students having already completed a study abroad ( $n = 73$ ), responded to a multiple-choice question targeting the obstacles they may have encountered. The main concerns, as well as the statistical differences between the two populations, are shown in Table 2.

	International students (71.9%)	Host students (20.9%)	Statistical difference	Total
Language level	44.6%	16.4%	<b>p = 0.1x10<sup>-4</sup></b>	38.7%
Paperwork	37.6%	37.0%	p = 1.000	37.5%
Time for paperwork	28.3%	28.8%	p = 1.000	28.4%
Costs	24.6%	39.7%	<b>p = 0.013</b>	27.8%
Language and success	16.4%	22.8%	p = 0.266	21.5%
Separation concerns	21.7%	12.3%	p = 0.097	19.8%
Fear of the unknown	20.6%	12.3%	p = 0.130	18.9%
No obstacles	14.1%	24.7%	<b>p = 0.029</b>	16.3%

Table 2: Obstacles to academic mobility

The most frequent source of concern for the 349 students responding to this question was related to language, be it general language use or the need for language certification. However, this language concern was significantly ( $p = 0.0001$ ) more often declared by international students entering France (44.6%), than French students having studied abroad (16.4%). This does not indicate that French students have a greater level of language skills. To the contrary, many host students indicated a desire for more language courses. Other factors, such as the previously discussed fact of France's

traditionally limited outward mobility, also come into play. Furthermore, slightly over a third (34.1%) of the international students also declared that one of their motivations for mobility to this university was the opportunity to attend classes in French. These two positions of concern about a foreign language and the motivation to practice it remain compatible. These abundant responses highlight an interlaced phenomenon of motivation, uncertainty and necessity related to language and mobility.

The administrative paperwork (37.5%) and the time need to complete this paperwork (27.8%) were respectively the next most frequently declared obstacles to academic mobility, with no significant difference between the host and international populations. Many international students commented on the difficulty of communicating only in French with administrative staff, thereby aggravating the situation. Thus, one-third of the students flag time-consuming administrative tasks as a real obstacle to mobility, an obstacle commonly linked to stress.

One-third of these students (27.8%) also emphasized financial concerns as an obstacle to academic mobility. This often-stressful concern was more important ( $p = 0.013$ ) for French students having completed a study abroad (39.7%), than for international students (24.6%). This difference may be due to the reasonable tuition rates and complimentary costs in France (Lasanowski & Verbik, 2007), such as for housing or tuition, compared to other countries, with dramatic differences, for example, to those in the United States. However, it should be noted that financial and language barriers may prohibit some students from undertaking academic mobility. These students who have abandoned a project of mobility are not included in these results.

After these administrative and financial obstacles, participants declared concerns related to their academic and personal issues, with no significant difference between the host and international students. These concerns include the 'fear of not succeeding as

well as in my own language' (21.5%), separation from family and friends (19.8%) and the fear of the unknown (18.9%). While students from all levels of study declared a concern about separation from family or friends, undergraduate students were more likely to fear the unknown (24.3%), compared to only 10.1% of doctoral students. This apprehension is mirrored by the advice suggested by an international student:

It is normal to feel nervous when you enter a new chapter in your life in a new place (especially if you come from countries far away from France). But do not let your fear prevent you from doing the best and experiencing all the new things that will come to you. (1492)<sup>1</sup>

These three sources of anxiety – academic success in a foreign language, separation from family and friends and fear of the unknown – clearly underline the difficulty to go beyond one's regular 'comfort zone', when exploring new avenues. In an open-ended question on advice to future international students, international participants confirm this difficulty of stepping out of one's regular sphere, stating for example:

You have to participate in the life of the faculty, get out of your bubble, go ask for help if necessary. You will be all the more successful if you have surrounded yourself well. (1563, translated from French).

French students also echo this concept of a foreign country being outside of one's comfort zone:

Do not hesitate to go out of your comfort zone and face studies abroad. Go abroad for an internship or study. (431, translated from French).

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers refer to participant's anonymous identifying number.



Finally, a minority (16.3%) of students in or having completed an experience of academic mobility declared encountering ‘no obstacles’ for their departure. However, this is significantly more so for the French students going abroad (24.7%,  $p = 0.029$ ). Only 14.1% of international students declared not encountering any obstacles to study in a foreign country.

### *Language needs and practices*

While language learning or practice may be a motivating factor for academic mobility and also to fulfill professional tasks, it also presents a difficulty, especially in a non-English setting such as that of the current study. Thus, the survey included four separate multiple-choice questions directly related to 1) their family language practices, 2) their extra-curricular language practices with other students, 3) their capacity to study in given languages and 4) their expected professional language needs. The responses to these four questions are synthesized in Table 3. The responses focused on French and English, but also includes over fifty other languages totalized in Column 5 of Table 3 ‘Language diversity’. This included monolingual families, notably Spanish-, Arabic- and Chinese-speaking families, multilingual families, but also professional needs, typically multiple languages, often including French and English.

Table 3. Languages practiced according to context (N = 1900)

	French only	English and French	English only	Language diversity
Spoken with family	72.1%	1.7%	1.7%	24.5%
Spoken outside of class	71.4%	17.4%	2.7%	8.4%
Academic use	33.5%	46.6%	4.0%	15.9%
Professional need	14.0%	56.0%	5.2%	24.8%

Nearly three-fourths (72.1%) of the population speak only French with their family. This monolingualism of French speakers is mirrored in the language practices

outside the classroom, with 71% of the total population speaking only French with other students outside of the classroom. However, there are more varied academic language skills, with almost half (46.6%) of the population reporting the ability to study in both French and English. It should be noted that monolingualism is a possible professional solution for only one-fifth of the population, whether this be in French (14.0%) or English (5.2%).

More than half of the population (56%) consider they must master both French and English for professional reasons and one-quarter (24.8%) need other or more languages. In contrast, one-quarter of the students speak several languages with their family, including French and/or English (24.5%) or simply French and English (1.7%). Despite the professional needs for English and other languages, as well as the capacity to study in various languages, there is but a modest number of students who speak with other students outside of class in other languages, notably English and French (17.4%), or other languages (8.4%). In other words, there is a pool of students on campus who speak languages other than French, but this does not necessarily translate into social plurilingualism, especially for people of French origin. Despite this lack of social plurilingualism, French students do recommend interacting with people speaking other languages: ‘Go to the many English pubs in the city for real-live practice of the language’ (1396, comment translated from French) or ‘Have a friend who speaks the language you are learning!’ (479, comment translated from French).

### *Use of services and participation in social events*

In order to identify possible nexus of interaction between host and international students, we examined their university life practices. For this, students were asked to identify the services accessed or events attended as listed in a multiple-choice question with the possibility of selecting more than one response. Table 4 displays the answers

by order of popularity across the two populations of host (N = 1,453; 82.9%) and international (N = 299; 20.9%) students, as well as statistical differences between the two populations.

Table 4. Use of or participation in university and extra-university services and events by host and international students.

	Host Students	International Students	Statistical difference	Total
Libraries	<b>75.6%</b>	58.5%	<b>p = 0.001</b>	72.7%
University cafeterias	56.8%	51.2%	p = 0.074	55.9%
University athletics	39.4%	35.1%	p = 0.171	38.7%
Non-university events	33.9%	33.8%	p = 1.000	33.8%
University events	33.2%	26.8%	<b>p = 0.029</b>	32.1%
Orientation	<b>22.9%</b>	12.0%	<b>p = 0.001</b>	21.1%
University housing	15.5%	<b>29.1%</b>	<b>p = 0.001</b>	17.8%
Multi-nationality events	13.0%	<b>35.5%</b>	<b>p = 0.001</b>	16.8%

Libraries were the most frequent university service selected by both groups (72.7%), however, significantly more ( $p = 0.001$ ) host students (75.6%) declared visiting the library than international students (58.5%). Worldwide, many university libraries offer open learning/social space that accommodate student interaction. In their ethnological study of such a UK library, Bryant, Mathews and Walton (2009) observed much study activity, including large social groups of up to 20 students and ‘others, particularly groups of students for whom English was a second language, [who] would often work together and engage in lively discussions’ (p. 11). According to the authors, the popularity of one such library space suggests ‘that it has become a desirable venue on campus, somewhere comfortable where people can work and socialize in an informal environment’ (p. 12). Hence, this institutional structure appears to offer an excellent venue for host-international student interaction, although relatively fewer international students may benefit relative to the host student population, if their use of this service does not increase.

Other popular university services, such as university cafeterias (55.9%) and campus athletics (38.7%) were equally attended by both populations, demonstrating their possibilities for enhancing interaction between the two populations through planned actions in these highly social contexts. Events organized outside of the university (33.8%) were also equally popular for both groups, demonstrating the importance of extra-academic networks. Students may also have plans for travel in France or Europe as mentioned by 14.3% of students in a separate multiple-choice question on motivations, and as highlighted by the comment of an international student to an open-ended question soliciting advice for future international students:

Begin planning your time [at the host university] way in advance. If you can, talk with current students/find a pen pal so that you can have an idea of what you're getting into. This way your transition in France will be easier and you can start ideas (and start planning!) various trips or "bucket list" items you want to do during your stay here. (1045)

Closer to home, host students (22.9%) significantly ( $p = 0.001$ ) declared more often than international students (12.0%) that they attended orientation. The limited number of international students attending optional orientation may have a ripple effect, limiting international students' integration throughout the academic year. This may be compounded by the slightly significant ( $p = 0.029$ ) fewer number of international students (26.8%) attending other university events and establishing their bearings on campus. As one French student suggested to future students, 'Walk a lot on campus so that you can find your bearings. Use the proposed maps' (30, translated from French).

In contrast, international students were significantly more likely ( $p = 0.001$ ) to live in university housing (29.1%) and to participate ( $p = 0.001$ ) in events with other international participants (35.5%). Thus, university housing appears to be an excellent

source for multi-national interactive student integration as a source that already largely favors interaction between international students.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

This empirical study has attempted to identify obstacles to host and international student interactions in order to support the internationalization of the university campus, where English is not the main language. It does not attempt to identify the reasons for individual financial or psychological differences among students. This study has focused on the global importance of perceived obstacles to academic mobility and to quality of life during mobility, language needs and practices, which are major concerns for many students and finally participation in university life. We hope that identifying these shortages may help administrators, faculty, staff and other stakeholders to know the needs of international students and to better services provided to international and host students alike. The key findings are illustrated in Figure 2, which mirrors the initial model of influences on host-international student integration (*cf.* Figure 1).

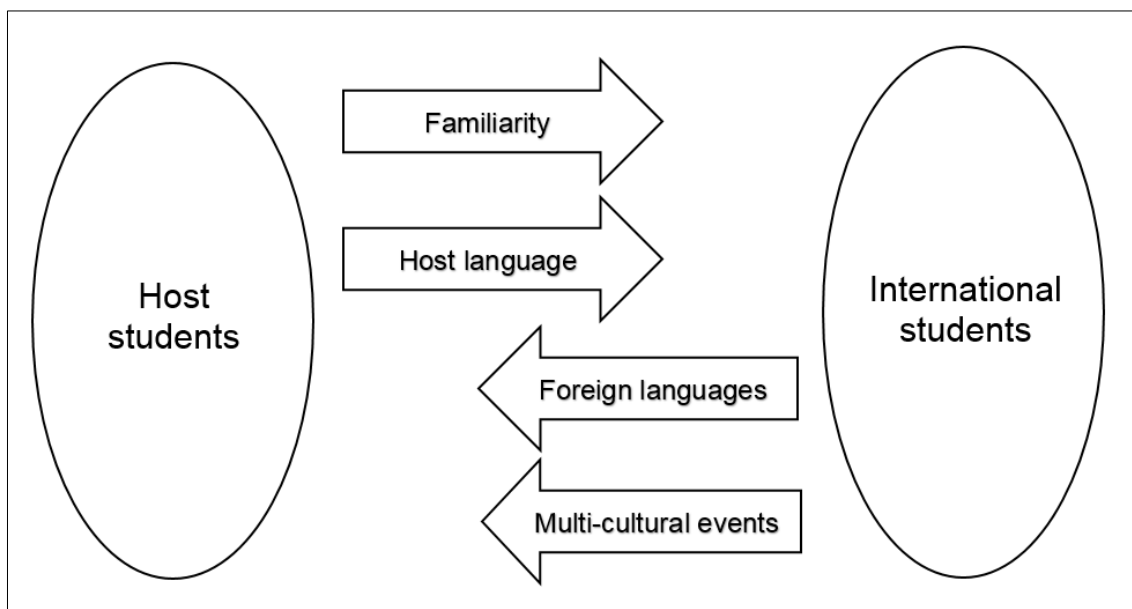


Figure 2: Influences of host and international students

This study identifies the strengths and difficulties of host and international students as played out in their declared fears and practices. An understanding of these factors may help institutions establish effective policies, events, and services. Host students possess a greater knowledge of the local academic setting and procedures, while international students are faced with multiple administrative tasks, often aggravated by language issues. Host students also have a considerable advantage of fluency in the main academic, administrative and social language. In contrast, international students bring a rich breadth of language skills and cultural perspectives, which does not always correspond to local needs. Furthermore, many international students already participate in multi-language social interactions and events, unlike many of their host counterparts. These factors may serve as foundations for policy improvements and increasing students' comfort zone.

Developing language skills impacts internationalization at many student and institutional levels. Language teaching and multi-cultural awareness should be offered to administrative staff in contact with international students. For students preparing a mobility, intensive language teaching may occur before or upon arrival and needs to address specifically administrative and academic obligations. It would also be wise to support social events with the local students and population.

Host students appear to miss or ignore the opportunity to engage in foreign-language practice or interaction with students during multi-national events, thus also depriving international students of an easier integration. To enhance the sense of community between host and international students, while redressing the lack of multilingual and multicultural exchanges, we suggest a greater emphasis on involving teachers in the classroom. This will help to address the complexity of multicultural coexistence as discussed *supra* (Freire & Macedo, 1995). Attentive teachers can assure

that class materials, including mandatory or recommended reading assignments, offer an international perspective or structure group-work partnering both host and international students, which is possible in a wide range of disciplines.

For international students, preparation to reduce fears of the ‘unknown’ and assistance for administrative tasks might include individual emails, specific orientation sessions parallel to general ones where international students may be underrepresented, or through the university website with information for settling in a new country. Specifically fostering host-international student interaction through ‘tandem partnerships’, dining events or organized travel events are also possibilities. Libraries, dining services and sports centers may be key centers for enhanced opportunities for integration.

This study did not evaluate why some students do not attempt or are unable to study abroad. Further research should evaluate this phenomenon, notably the question of economic status, origin, first language and gender.

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