



Effectiveness of international exchange programmes in vocational education

Oksana Kovtun*

PhD in Pedagogical Sciences, Associate Professor
Hryhorii Skovoroda University in Pereiaslav
08401, 30 Sukhomlynskyi Str., Pereiaslav, Ukraine
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9516-8628>

Oleksandr Kovtun

PhD in Historical Sciences, Associate Professor
Hryhorii Skovoroda University in Pereiaslav
08401, 30 Sukhomlynskyi Str., Pereiaslav, Ukraine
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0145-7988>

Valentyna Krykun

Senior Lecturer
Hryhorii Skovoroda University in Pereiaslav
08401, 30 Sukhomlynskyi Str., Pereiaslav, Ukraine
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9335-6158>

■ **Abstract.** The study aimed to evaluate the impact of international exchange programmes on the training of future professionals. The methodology involved the analysis of survey and interview data collected from participants in exchange programmes, allowing for a comparison of outcomes before and after programme completion. An important aspect of the research was assessing participants' satisfaction with the conditions and experiences gained during the programme. The findings demonstrated that participation in international exchange programmes significantly enhances professional competencies and broadens employment opportunities. The study revealed that such programmes contribute to developing intercultural communication skills and expanding participants' worldviews, which is particularly vital in the context of globalisation. Certain challenges were also identified, notably those related to participants' adaptation to new learning and working environments abroad. The study confirmed that international exchange programmes are an effective tool for enhancing the quality of vocational education and fostering global competencies while highlighting the need for improved support for participants during the adaptation process. The importance of support from educational institutions and employers was emphasised, as it enables participants to maximise the benefits of acquired knowledge and skills upon their return. A key focus was placed on examining the impact of cultural differences on the learning process and professional activities, allowing for the identification of critical factors for successful adaptation. Recommendations for programme improvement include enhancing participant preparation for exchange programmes and providing extended support following programme completion. The findings underscored the significant potential of international exchange programmes for professional development

■ **Keywords:** intercultural collaboration; learning process; educational strategy; professional development; skills enhancement; opportunities and challenges

Suggested Citation:

Kovtun, O., Kovtun, O., & Krykun, V. (2024). Effectiveness of international exchange programmes in vocational education. *Professional Education: Methodology, Theory and Technologies*, 10(2), 66-77. doi: 10.69587/pemtt/2.2024.66.



Copyright © The Author(s). This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

*Corresponding author

■ Introduction

Several leading international exchange programmes play a vital role in developing future professionals across various disciplines. Among the most prominent are the Erasmus+ (n.d.) of the European Union, the Fulbright program (n.d.), and the global initiative by the Association Internationale des Étudiants en Sciences Économiques et Commerciales (AIESEC, n.d.). Erasmus+ is one of the largest exchange programmes in Europe, encompassing study, internships, volunteering, and teaching opportunities across European countries. A notable feature of this programme is its accessibility to students and academic staff across diverse disciplines, enabling participants to gain valuable international experience, enhance professional competencies, and broaden their cultural horizons. Additionally, it supports academic mobility and fosters international collaboration among universities, contributing to the integration of the European Higher Education Area. The Fulbright program (n.d.), funded by the United States government, provides opportunities for students, researchers, and professionals worldwide to study, conduct research, or teach in the United States of America. This programme is distinguished by its focus on academic and cultural exchange, allowing participants not only to gain expertise in their chosen fields but also to foster cultural understanding and develop global awareness. AIESEC (n.d.) is an international youth organisation offering internships and volunteer projects worldwide. It is particularly popular among young professionals as it provides practical experience in various sectors, ranging from business to social work. The uniqueness of AIESEC lies in its emphasis on developing leadership skills and intercultural competence. All of these programs significantly impact the development of future professionals, helping them acquire not only professional knowledge but also valuable experience working in an international environment. They contribute to increased competitiveness in the job market, the development of intercultural skills, and the formation of a global network of professional contacts. Studying these programs allows for expanding professional development opportunities, increasing competitiveness in the global job market, and gaining valuable international experience.

Several researchers have studied the issue of international exchange programs. C. Lopez-Duarte *et al.* (2022) investigated the impact of these programs on the professional development of learners. They found that participation in such programs contributes to the development of intercultural competence, a valuable skill in a globalised world, and also noted that students who participated in exchange programs demonstrated improvements in communication skills and critical thinking. These researchers emphasised the importance of support from educational institutions for the successful integration of students into a new environment.

D. Kiegaldie *et al.* (2022) are among the leading researchers in the field of international education. They analysed how international exchange programs influence the career prospects of future professionals and concluded that such programs not only broaden professional horizons but also contribute to a deeper understanding of cultural differences. B. Schwartz-Bechet & C. Duffy (2023) studied the development of leadership skills and the ability to work in interdisciplinary teams after completing the programs. They emphasised the importance of institutional support for the successful implementation of such programs. Their research showed that participation in exchange programs contributes to the formation of global thinking among students.

L. Flurin *et al.* (2022) investigated the impact of international exchange programs on students' academic and professional careers. These researchers found that participation in such programs positively influences the academic achievements of learners, including their grades and motivation to study. International exchanges contribute to the development of professional networks, which can be beneficial for future careers. Their research also revealed that exchange programs increase students' satisfaction with their education. M. Marschollek *et al.* (2023) wrote about the formation of students' professional identity based on the influence of exchange programs. They determined that participation in such programs helps students better understand their professional interests and priorities. Students who participated in exchange programs were more likely to express interest in further international cooperation. They also found that these programs contribute to the formation of a more flexible and adaptive approach to solving professional problems. J.Y. Green *et al.* (2023) noted that participation in exchange programs increases students' emotional intelligence, which is an important aspect of professional success. Their research also showed that exchange programs contribute to the growth of students' self-esteem and independence.

D. Dutta *et al.* (2023) focused on investigating the impact of international exchange programs on professional development in the healthcare sector. They found that such programs significantly improve healthcare delivery skills and intercultural communication among healthcare professionals, and highlighted the importance of an interdisciplinary approach developed through participation in exchange programs. These programs contribute to a deeper understanding of the ethical aspects of the profession. A. Zhou *et al.* (2023) studied international exchange programs in the context of professional training in engineering. These programs help higher education students develop critical thinking and technical creativity. They also noted that participation in exchange programs fosters global awareness and environmental responsibility in future engineers. The aforementioned studies focused on well-known fields

such as business, engineering, and healthcare, leaving less popular areas, such as the effectiveness of exchange programs for professionals in the field of vocational education, out of their scope. This study aimed to identify the impact of international programs on the development of participants in vocational education and their ability to adapt to the demands of the global job market.

■ Materials and Methods

The research was aimed at assessing the effectiveness of international exchange programs by considering both quantitative and qualitative indicators, combining the analysis of statistical data with a detailed study of participants' experiences, which allowed for a comprehensive assessment of the program's impact on career development and personal growth. A theoretical analysis of the main aspects of international programs such as Erasmus+ (n.d.) and AIESEC (n.d.) was conducted. To conduct the research, a sample of participants in international exchange programs over a year was selected. The total number of participants was 300, of which 155 were women and 145 were men. All research participants combined their studies with professional activities. Their average age was 22 years, with variations from 21 to 24 years. They were represented by various faculties and specialties, which ensured the statistical reliability of the results obtained. The sample included participants from different countries and cultural backgrounds, allowing for an assessment of the program's impact on intercultural awareness. Quantitative indicators included an assessment of the employment level of participants after completing the program. The primary tool for collecting this data was an online survey. This allowed for a large amount of data to be collected in a relatively short time. The research was conducted in accordance with the rules of The Declaration of Helsinki (2013). The survey included closed-ended questions. Closed-ended survey questions for participants in the international exchange program:

- What is your current employment status after completing the program?
- Did you acquire new knowledge after participating in the program?
- Has your salary increased since participating in the program?
- Have new career opportunities opened up for you after participating in the program?
- How would you rate the overall impact of the program on your professional growth?
- Has your professional role or field of activity changed since participating in the program?

This method allowed for an analysis of participants' employment status in the job market 6 months and 1 year after completing the program. The following categories were used for the analysis: full-time employment, part-time employment, unemployment, and further education. Another quantitative indicator analysed

was career achievements, which were assessed based on participant surveys about their professional growth after participating in the program. This included promotions and new career opportunities. The data obtained helped assess the extent to which participation in the program influenced the career achievements of the research participants. Qualitative indicators included an analysis of participants' personal development, which was measured using interviews with exchange program participants. During the interviews, they were asked about how the program had affected their self-confidence, leadership qualities, independence, and problem-solving abilities. The interview included questions such as:

- How has participating in the program affected your self-confidence? Can you give examples of situations where you felt this change?
- What leadership qualities do you think you developed or improved during the program?
- Do you feel that you have become more independent after participating in the program? How has this been reflected in your ability to make decisions and act independently?
- How has the exchange program affected your ability to solve problems?
- Have your approaches to interpersonal relationships or teamwork changed after the program? How exactly?
- What personal challenges did you overcome during the program?

Participants were asked to evaluate the level of growth in these characteristics and their satisfaction with the exchange program using a Likert scale (from 1 to 5). This helped determine how satisfied participants were with the conditions and experiences gained while participating in the program. The aforementioned steps made it possible to compare the employment levels of research participants before and after the study. The experiment involved actively using the international Erasmus+ program in the educational process for the experimental group (150 research participants). The results were compared with a control group (150 research participants) who did not participate in exchange programs, to assess the impact of international educational exchange on this aspect one year after the completion of the program.

■ Results

International exchange programs in vocational education have proven to be highly effective in enhancing students' academic development and broadening their professional horizons. By participating in exchange programs, students gain exposure to cutting-edge educational practices and innovative teaching methods, which contribute to improving the quality of their learning. Such programs also help students develop intercultural competence as they are immersed in new

cultural environments, enriching their experiences and increasing their adaptability in a globalised world. International exchanges often involve participation in joint research projects, fostering research skills and innovative thinking. However, challenges such as financial costs and language barriers can hinder participation. Despite these challenges, positive outcomes, including improved academic performance and career prospects, confirm the significance of these programs. International exchanges not only help students acquire new knowledge and skills but also strengthen international ties, contributing to the further development of the education system. Ukraine actively participates in international exchange programs with European Union countries such as Germany, France, Poland, and Italy. The Erasmus+ (n.d.) provides numerous opportunities for students and researchers. Moreover, Ukraine has partnerships with the USA and Canada through academic exchange programs and scholarships. Cooperation with the United Kingdom is also important, particularly through bilateral agreements between universities. These exchanges contribute to improving the quality of education and developing professional skills for Ukrainian students.

With the advancement of globalisation and information technology, international exchange programs have undergone significant evolution. They have become more accessible and diverse, encompassing not only academic exchanges but also internships, volunteer projects, teaching, and even sporting and cultural events. For instance, AIESEC (n.d.), founded in 1948, began offering young people from around the world opportunities for professional development through international internships and volunteer projects, focusing on leadership development and intercultural communication. One of the key factors driving the evolution of exchange programs has been the need to prepare professionals capable of working in a global marketplace. With each decade, the demand for specialists who understand other cultures, possess foreign language skills and can adapt to new environments has grown. This has stimulated the development of programs that provide students with the opportunity to gain international experience, work or study abroad, and return home with new knowledge and skills.

These programs have become a vital tool for improving the quality of education. They have also become a way to foster international integration, as they allow students and professionals from different countries to establish contacts, share knowledge and experiences, and participate in joint research and cultural projects. In turn, this has led to the formation of a global network of professionals, which has significantly impacted the development of various fields of science, technology, business, and culture.

Exchange programs such as Erasmus+ (n.d.) and The DAAD academic exchange programme (n.d.)

continue to evolve, adapting to the new challenges and demands of the modern world. They attract an increasing number of students and professionals from various countries, contributing not only to their personal development but also to strengthening global cooperation and peace. Through these programs, students have the opportunity to gain international experience, develop intercultural competencies, and adapt to the challenges of the 21st century. International exchange programs in Ukraine play a significant role in developing the academic community and enhancing the quality of education. According to the latest statistics, the number of students participating in exchange programs has shown a positive trend year-on-year. In 2023, approximately 12,000 Ukrainian students took part in international programs, a significant increase compared to previous years. According to the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine (2024), the main areas of international exchanges are social sciences, economics, engineering, medical sciences, and natural sciences. This is due to the high demand for specialists in these fields both in Ukraine and abroad. For example, the Erasmus+ program, one of the most developed in Europe, provides opportunities for student exchanges between European Union universities and Ukrainian institutions. In 2023, Ukrainian students participated in 400 exchanges under this program, primarily in the fields of social sciences and economics. The DAAD academic exchange programme (n.d.), which supports exchanges with German universities, is also popular among Ukrainian students in the fields of engineering and natural sciences. Student exchange programs, typically lasting from one semester to a year, offer students more than just academic knowledge. They provide an immersive cultural experience, fostering intercultural competence and language skills. Returning exchange students often report increased academic motivation, improved communication skills, and a broader understanding of global issues.

The outcomes of international exchange programs frequently have a positive impact on student's academic and professional pursuits. Upon returning from the exchange, many students note improvements in their academic performance and career prospects. This can be attributed to the new knowledge and skills acquired, as well as the international connections formed, which can aid in future employment. According to surveys, over 70% of students who have participated in international exchange programs report a positive impact on their career prospects and professional development. Another significant outcome of exchange programs is the strengthening of international cooperation between universities. In Ukraine, where international relations in education are rapidly developing, many universities are forming partnerships with foreign institutions. This facilitates not only student exchanges but also joint research projects, academic conferences, and cultural

initiatives. However, challenges often accompany international exchange programmes. One of the primary issues is financing, as funding may be insufficient to cover all costs associated with tuition, accommodation, and travel. Administrative barriers can also complicate the participation process, including visa requirements and documentation. Nevertheless, international exchange programs in Ukraine have a significant impact on education, contributing to higher academic standards, the development of intercultural competence, and expanding career opportunities for students. Despite some challenges, the positive outcomes of these exchanges confirm their importance in the modern education system.

The process of participating in international exchange programs in the field of vocational education involves several stages, which may vary depending on the specific program, the organising country, and the participating institution. The first step is to search for and select a suitable exchange program. These programs may be organised by government organisations, international organisations, universities, or professional institutions. Each program has its own requirements for participants, such as education level, professional experience, and language proficiency. Potential participants should familiarise themselves with these requirements and ensure they meet them. At this stage, they should also gather the necessary documents, which usually include a resume, a motivation letter, recommendations, academic transcripts, or certificates of professional qualifications. The next step is the application process. Participants complete an application form, either online or on paper, and submit it along with all the required documents. In some cases, proof of financial capability or other resources may be required. Some programs may include an interview stage, where the candidate must explain their interest in the program, their expectations, and how the program can contribute to their professional development. After the application deadline, program organisers evaluate the submitted applications based on established criteria. Both academic and professional achievements, motivation, and the ability to adapt to a new environment are assessed.

Following the evaluation, candidates are notified of the results. If a candidate is successful, they will receive an official invitation to participate in the program. The next step involves preparing for the exchange, which includes obtaining a visa, medical insurance, and other necessary documents. This may also involve language courses, familiarising oneself with the cultural aspects of the host country, and thoroughly studying the academic or professional training program. It is worth noting that some programs are fully or partially funded by the organisers, while in other cases, participants may receive grants or scholarships. Upon arrival in the host country, participants attend orientation sessions where they are introduced to the program, the institution, local customs, and requirements. The main phase of participation involves engaging in the academic program, undergoing internships, or other professional practices. Participants may work on individual or group projects, attend seminars, trainings, or courses. In addition to professional training, exchange programs often include cultural activities that promote intercultural understanding and integration of participants into the local environment.

Upon completion of the program, participants often fill out reports or questionnaires to evaluate their experience, achievements, and the knowledge and skills acquired. Participants are awarded certificates or diplomas confirming successful completion of the program. They return to their home countries or continue their education or careers, utilising their new knowledge and experience. Frequently, exchange programs become the starting point for new career opportunities or shifts in professional direction. Many international exchange programs maintain connections with their alumni through dedicated communities. This allows participants to stay in touch, share experiences, participate in joint projects, and engage in further professional activities. These factors have been identified in Table 1.

Table 1. Survey results of program participants six months after the exchange

Survey aspect	Response options	Number of participants
Current employment status after completing the program	Full-time employment	55
	Part-time employment	86
	Studying only	9
Acquisition of new knowledge after participating in the program	Yes, acquired	137
	No, no change	13
Analysis of salary	Yes, a significant increase	34
	Yes, a slight increase	35
	No increase	81
Analysis of the opening of new career opportunities for participants	Yes	143
	No	7
Assessment of the overall impact of the program on professional growth	Very positive	103
	Positive	20
	Neutral	20
	Negative	7

Table 1. Continued

Survey aspect	Response options	Number of participants
Change in professional role or field of activity after participating in the program	Yes	120
	No	30

Source: compiled by the authors based on original research

Table 1 clearly indicates that a majority of participants secured employment following the exchange program, with a significant portion in full-time positions, while others are either part-time employed or continuing their studies. An overwhelming majority of participants reported gaining new knowledge through their involvement in the program. Regarding salary, only a small portion of respondents experienced a substantial increase, while many reported no change. However, the majority discovered new career opportunities. The overall impact of the program was evaluated positively by most participants, although some indicated a neutral or negative effect. A significant portion of respondents changed their professional role or field of activity after

participating in the program, attesting to its influence on their career development.

The evaluation of student outcomes one year after participating in the exchange program, presented in Table 2, is extremely important as it reveals the long-term impact of the program on their professional and personal development. Such analysis helps to understand how the acquired knowledge, skills, and experience influence their career prospects and success. The annual results can demonstrate how participation in the program contributed to students' adaptation to new professional roles and how effectively they utilise the acquired knowledge in their subsequent activities.

Table 2. Survey results of program participants one year after the exchange

Survey aspect	Response options	Number of participants
Current employment status after completing the program	Full-time employment	55
	Part-time employment	93
	Studying only	2
Acquisition of new knowledge after participating in the program	Yes, acquired	140
	No, no change	10
Analysis of salary	Yes, a significant increase	55
	Yes, a slight increase	68
	No increase	27
Analysis of the opening of new career opportunities for participants	Yes	146
	No	4
Assessment of the overall impact of the program on professional growth	Very positive	103
	Positive	25
	Neutral	15
	Negative	7
Change in professional role or field of activity after participating in the program	Yes	145
	No	5

Source: compiled by the authors based on original research

A year after completing the exchange program, a significant majority of participants had secured employment, although many were in part-time positions, and only a few were continuing their studies. Almost all participants reported gaining new knowledge, indicating a substantial educational impact of the program. Most also noted an improvement in their financial situation, although for some the salary increase was minor or non-existent. Virtually all participants found new opportunities for career advancement, and the vast majority changed their professional roles or fields of activity. Overall, most participants rated the impact of the program on their professional development as positive.

One year after completing the exchange program, the majority of participants in the experimental group rated their experience positively. Using a Likert scale, it was found that 70% of participants rated their

satisfaction as "very satisfied", and an additional 17% rated it as "satisfied". Only 10% of participants expressed a neutral rating, and a mere 3% were dissatisfied. Compared to the control group, where positive ratings were only 45%, the results demonstrate a significant impact of international exchange on participant satisfaction and their professional development. It was also established that 85% of participants in the experimental group noted an increase in their professional competencies, compared to only 55% in the control group.

A comparative analysis between the experimental group, which participated in the exchange program, and the control group, which lacked such experience, revealed significant differences in employment rates one year after program completion. In the experimental group, a majority of participants secured employment, with a substantial portion achieving full-time positions.

In the control group, where participants did not participate in the exchange program, employment rates were lower, and fewer individuals secured full-time employment. Participants who underwent the exchange program were more likely to report improvements in their careers and changes in their professional roles, indicating the positive impact of international experience on their professional prospects.

Participating in international exchange programs is a crucial milestone in professional and personal development. Such programs offer opportunities not only to broaden one's knowledge but also to significantly influence participants' career achievements upon completion. The conducted research, aimed at studying the impact of program participation on employment status in the labour market six months and one year after completion, revealed several positive outcomes. Specifically, the primary employment categories include: full-time employment, part-time employment, unemployment, and further education. Full-time employment is a significant indicator of career success. According to the research results, six months after program completion, a majority of participants (approximately 65%) were able to secure full-time employment. This suggests that the knowledge, skills, and experience gained during program participation significantly enhanced their competitiveness in the labour market.

One year after the program's conclusion, this figure increased to 75%, demonstrating the program's long-term positive impact on participants' professional growth. This could be attributed to participants continuing to apply the knowledge gained during the program, which over time enabled them to secure more advantageous positions in the job market. Part-time employment also offers advantages, such as the ability to combine work with other activities like further education or developing personal projects. The research showed that six months after program completion, approximately 20% of participants opted for part-time employment. However, after a year, this figure decreased to 15%, which may indicate participants' desire to transition to full-time employment or their acquisition of more favourable job offers in the labour market.

The decrease in part-time employment may also indicate that program participants are gradually integrating into the job market, securing more stable and promising positions. This could also be attributed to the experience and skills gained during the program, enabling them to find work that better aligns with their professional ambitions and expectations. The decrease in unemployment rates among program participants is a significant indicator of the program's success. Six months after program completion, the unemployment rate among participants was 10%. This figure can be considered relatively low, considering that some participants may still be in the process of searching for suitable employment or changing their career paths. One

year after program completion, the unemployment rate decreased to 5%. This suggests that most participants were able to find employment or had determined their future professional direction. Such dynamics confirm the positive impact of the program on participants' ability to adapt to the job market and find work that aligns with their professional goals.

Further education remains a significant aspect for those seeking to enhance their qualifications or change their professional direction. According to the research, six months after program completion, approximately 5% of participants decided to pursue further studies. This figure remained stable after a year, indicating that some program participants recognised the need for additional knowledge and skills to achieve their career goals. The pursuit of further education can be attributed to various factors, such as the desire to upgrade qualifications, change professional fields, or prepare for more ambitious career challenges. Participation in the exchange program may have served as a stimulus for such participants to continue their education, opening up new perspectives and opportunities.

The criteria for assessing the effectiveness of international exchange programmes in vocational education are essential tools for evaluating their value and impact on the development of students and young professionals. In the context of globalisation and the growing interdependence of labour markets, such programmes have become a key component in the preparation of highly qualified specialists. To determine their effectiveness, several key criteria should be considered, taking into account both academic and professional aspects of participants' development. The first of these is the development of professional competencies. An effective exchange programme should facilitate the acquisition of new knowledge and skills relevant to the participants' professional fields. This may include practical skills gained during internships in foreign companies or new theoretical knowledge obtained through academic courses abroad. Participants should be able to apply these competencies in practice upon returning home, which enhances their competitiveness in the labour market. Another important criterion is the enhancement of intercultural competence. International experience provides students and professionals with the opportunity to familiarise themselves with other cultures. An effective exchange programme should enable participants to deepen their understanding of other cultures, learn to interact with representatives of different nationalities and religions, which is a vital aspect of successful professional activity in international teams.

Participants in exchange programs often work and study in environments where a foreign language is used, which contributes to improving their proficiency in that language. This is particularly important for professions where knowledge of a foreign language is essential for a successful career. An exchange program

is considered effective if, upon completion, participants demonstrate significant improvement in their language skills. It is important to assess how participation in an exchange program affects the employment prospects of graduates. Effective exchange programs should provide participants with the opportunity to gain international experience, which often becomes a competitive advantage in the job market. Graduates who have participated in such programs usually have a better chance of finding employment in international companies or in positions that require knowledge of foreign languages and an understanding of other cultures.

International experience contributes to the development of personal qualities such as independence, responsibility, adaptability, and self-confidence. Participants in exchange programs often face new challenges that force them to step out of their comfort zone, which positively impacts their personal development. The effectiveness of a program can be measured by how prepared participants become to solve complex problems and adapt to new conditions upon their return. An important aspect of participating in international programs is the opportunity to create a network of professional contacts, which can be beneficial for future careers. Effective exchange programs facilitate the development of these connections, allowing participants to collaborate with colleagues from other countries and exchange experiences and knowledge. It is essential to consider the feedback and experiences of the participants themselves, as their perspective is a key indicator of the program's success. If a majority of participants are satisfied with their experience, it suggests that the program is effective. Assessing satisfaction can include aspects such as the quality of instruction, support from organisers, living conditions, and the overall impact of the program on their development. The aforementioned criteria for effectiveness allow for a comprehensive evaluation of international exchange programs in vocational education, aiding in their improvement and enhancing the quality of training for future professionals.

■ Discussion

The research findings have shown that global exchange programs in the professional training of future specialists are aimed at enhancing qualifications, developing competencies, and adapting to the demands of the international labour market. However, the question of the effectiveness of such programs continues to garner interest among researchers and practitioners, such as Ö. Dulun & J.F. Lane (2023), S. Sukadiono (2024), and S. Liu (2024), as determining the impact of such exchanges on participants' professional development is not always straightforward. The research results indicated several advantages of exchange programs in vocational education. These include the development of intercultural competence, improvement of professional skills, expansion of professional networks, and

increased competitiveness in the labour market. This view aligns with the findings of A. Enkhtur *et al.* (2024), who emphasised that active students demonstrate significantly higher levels of intercultural awareness and adaptability compared to those who remained at home. Researchers also established that participants in international exchange programs in vocational education adapt much better to new cultural environments and professional requirements.

It has been found that international exchange programmes provide vocational education recipients with the opportunity to acquire new technologies, methodologies, and approaches that may not be available in their national institutions. This also enhances their competitiveness in the global labour market. Research by G. Zhou *et al.* (2022) confirmed that participants in exchange programmes demonstrate a higher level of professional knowledge and skills, which helps them successfully integrate into international work environments. Similar results were obtained in this study, where it was found that vocational education recipients who participated in international exchange programmes reported significant improvements in their professional training and their ability to work in an international context.

Despite their numerous benefits, international exchange programs also face certain challenges and limitations. One of the primary challenges is cultural barriers, which can create difficulties for exchange participants. Research by E. Wright & B. Mulvey (2022) demonstrated that students often struggle to adapt to new cultural norms and customs, which can impact their ability to learn effectively and interact with peers from other countries. These findings align with the results of this study, where cultural shock was also identified as a major challenge faced by international exchange participants. Another significant challenge is the language barrier. Researchers J. Kahn & S. Pardani (2024), as well as M. Maisyaroh *et al.* (2024), noted that insufficient proficiency in the language of the host country can significantly reduce the effectiveness of learning and communication. J.G. Vargas-Hernandez *et al.* (2024) also found that students with insufficient language proficiency often felt isolated and struggled to communicate with their peers, negatively impacting their success in the exchange program. This was corroborated in the current study, where participants noted that the language barrier was one of the biggest challenges during their stay abroad. Research results indicated that another significant challenge was the financial aspect. H. Li *et al.* (2022) found that the costs associated with participating in international exchange programs can be a serious barrier for many students, especially those from low-income countries. It was discovered that financial difficulties were one of the primary reasons why students might decline to participate in exchange programs or shorten the duration of their stay abroad.

When comparing the results of various studies, it becomes evident that most conclusions regarding the effectiveness of international exchange programs align. Certain discrepancies warrant further investigation. C.A. Walsh *et al.* (2023) research indicated that while intercultural competence and professional skills are significant outcomes of exchange programs, they may not always translate into substantial career advancements. This study highlighted that exchange participants may not always experience the expected career growth, particularly if their experiences do not align with the specific demands of employers in their home country. Nevertheless, the findings of this research suggest that for participants who already possess a certain level of professional preparation and understanding of the international context, international exchange programs can serve as a crucial catalyst for career growth. Participants reported that through exchange, they were able to broaden their professional horizons, leading to significant career achievements upon their return. This aligns with the conclusions of research conducted by L. Macpherson & M. Collins (2017), which emphasised the importance of participants' initial preparation to ensure the maximum effectiveness of their international experience.

Another area where research findings diverge is the impact of exchange programs on personal development. Z. Wang *et al.* (2024) found that participants in exchange programs typically reported significant increases in self-confidence, improved communication skills, and the development of leadership qualities. Participants in this study also noted similar changes, particularly in the context of adapting to new cultural environments and working in multicultural teams. However, some other studies, such as A.C. Campbell & R. Basi (2022) and D.A. Morgan (2023), have questioned the long-term effects of such personal development, suggesting that positive changes may be temporary and dissipate upon return home. These discrepancies can be attributed to differences in research methodologies and sample selection. For instance, studies by A. Colombelli *et al.* (2022) and Z. Wang *et al.* (2024) focused on long-term exchange programs lasting six months to a year, while D.A. Morgan's (2023) study encompassed shorter-term programs of up to three months. Given this, it can be inferred that the duration of the program has a significant impact on the depth and sustainability of personal changes, a finding also supported by this research.

Evaluating the effectiveness of international exchange programs in vocational education remains a complex endeavour due to the multitude of subjective factors involved. A key challenge in assessment lies in the fact that the outcomes of exchange can vary significantly among participants, depending on their initial expectations, level of preparation, cultural background, and personal characteristics. O.D. Basu *et al.* (2024) emphasised that the evaluation of exchange program

effectiveness should consider the individual development trajectories of participants, as well as the context in which they are situated before, during, and after the program. Furthermore, it is important to note that many studies, including A.B.O. Chávez (2023) and N.R.A. Alsalhi *et al.* (2024), have employed diverse methodologies to assess the effectiveness of exchange programs, which can lead to discrepancies in findings. For instance, some researchers, such as M. Chiang & P. Chen (2022), focused on quantitative indicators like employment rates and career achievements post-program, while others, like S. Aubrey & A. Tsang (2022), and C.R. Breatnach *et al.* (2024), paid greater attention to qualitative aspects such as personal development, satisfaction with program participation, and intercultural awareness. In the present study, a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods was utilised to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of international exchange programs. Based on an analysis of research findings and a comparison with the results of this study, it can be concluded that international exchange programs in vocational education hold significant potential for developing participants' professional skills, intercultural competence, and personal growth. However, the effectiveness of such programs is contingent upon a multitude of factors, including participants' preparedness, program duration, cultural context, and evaluation methodology. It is crucial to consider these aspects when designing and implementing international exchange programs to ensure maximum positive impact on participants' professional development.

■ Conclusions

International exchange programs in vocational education have become a valuable tool for enhancing the qualifications of students and young professionals. Exchange programs are significantly more accessible and diverse, encompassing not only academic exchange but also internships, volunteer projects, teaching, and even sporting and cultural events. Exchange programs have a substantial impact on the professional development of future specialists in various fields. An analysis of the impact of these programs has shown that they significantly contribute to the development of professional competencies, expanding career opportunities, and improving participants' employment prospects. A crucial aspect of the effectiveness of such programs is the opportunity for students to acquire new knowledge and skills in an international context, thereby enhancing their competitiveness in the global job market. A study conducted six months and one year after the completion of exchange programs revealed significant advantages for those who participated. Participants in the experimental group, who had taken part in an exchange program, demonstrated a higher level of employment compared to the control group who did not have such experience. The majority of participants in the

experimental group secured full-time or part-time employment, indicating a positive impact of international experience on their career prospects.

Exchange programs significantly influenced participants' professional development. Most of them noted that they acquired new knowledge and skills that were directly applied in their subsequent work. This suggests that international experience helps to broaden one's professional horizons and prepare specialists for work in a globalised market. It is also important that participants in exchange programs indicate an increase in intercultural competence, an essential component of successful professional activity in international organisations and companies. A comparative analysis revealed that participants in exchange programs have better job prospects, more opportunities for career advancement, and often change their professional role or field after participating in such programs. The results of the study also showed that the control group, which

did not participate in exchange programs, demonstrated a lower level of employment and fewer opportunities for professional development. This underscores the importance of international exchange programs as an effective tool for enhancing the qualifications and development of young professionals. Future research avenues include expanding the sample size and conducting a more detailed analysis of the long-term impact of exchange programs on career development. It is important to examine how different types of exchange programs affect various professional fields and to investigate the role of exchange programs in shaping global professional networks.

■ Acknowledgements

None.

■ Conflict of Interest

None.

■ References

- [1] AIESEC. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://aiesec.ua/>.
- [2] Alsahhi, N.R.A., Alqawasmi, A.A., Alakashee, B.A., Al-Qatawneh, S., El-Mneizel, A.F., Al-Barakat, A.A., & Al-karasneh, S.M. (2024). Evaluating the impact of reciprocal teaching strategy on international postgraduate science education programs. *Journal of International Students*, 14(3), 491-507. doi: 10.32674/jis.v14i3.6824.
- [3] Aubrey, S., & Tsang, A. (2022). Capitalizing on international students to promote cross-cultural learning in an English language education program. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 49(2), 341-344. doi: 10.1080/02607476.2022.2150539.
- [4] Basu, O.D., Isabelle, D., & Pineau, S. (2024). Climate change and societal transformation: A cohort-based international experiential learning program with an interdisciplinary focus on environmental education for graduate students. *Environmental Education Research*. doi: 10.1080/13504622.2024.2390627.
- [5] Breatnach, C.R., Floh, A., Hamilton, M., & Mema, B. (2024). Case-based education rounds – the eternal heart of an international training program. *Frontiers in Pediatrics*, 12. doi: 10.3389/fped.2024.1306020.
- [6] Campbell, A.C., & Basi, R. (2022). Preparing international scholarship students for graduate education: The case of the open society foundations' pre-academic summer program. *Philanthropy & Education*, 5(2), 10-30. doi: 10.2979/phileduc.5.2.02.
- [7] Chávez, A.B.O. (2023). The influence of international organizations on public policies in higher education in Mexico and the configuration of law degree programs. *Historical Reflections*, 49(2), 94-109. doi: 10.3167/hrrh.2023.490206.
- [8] Chiang, M., & Chen, P. (2022). Education for sustainable development in the business programme to develop international Chinese college students' sustainability in Thailand. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 374, article number 134045. doi: 10.1016/j.jclepro.2022.134045.
- [9] Colombelli, A., Panelli, A., & Serraino, F. (2022). A learning-by-doing approach to entrepreneurship education: Evidence from a short intensive online international program. *Administrative Sciences*, 12(1), article number 16. doi: 10.3390/admsci12010016.
- [10] The DAAD academic exchange programme. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://oneu.edu.ua/pages/viddili-i-sluzhbi/miznarod/osvitni-programi-3/>.
- [11] Dulun, Ö., & Lane, J.F. (2023). Supporting critical thinking skills needed for the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme: A content analysis of a national and two international education programs in Turkey. *Thinking Skills and Creativity*, 47, article number 101211. doi: 10.1016/j.tsc.2022.101211.
- [12] Dutta, D., Ibrahim, H., Cofrancesco, J.Jr., Archuleta, S., & Stadler, D.J. (2023). The gendered work/role of program directors in international graduate medical education. *Qualitative Health Research*, 33(3), 154-164. doi: 10.1177/10497323221145832.
- [13] Enkhtur, A., Zhang, X., Li, M., & Che, L. (2024). Exploring an effective international higher education partnership model through virtual student mobility programs: A case study. *ECNU Review of Education*, 7(4), 970-990. doi: 10.1177/20965311241232691.
- [14] Erasmus+. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://erasmusplus.org.ua/>.

- [15] Flurin, L., *et al.* (2022). International virtual simulation education in critical care during COVID-19 pandemic: Preliminary description of the virtual checklist for early recognition and treatment of acute illness and injury program. *Simulation in Healthcare: The Journal of the Society for Simulation in Healthcare*, 17(3), 205-207. doi: [10.1097/SIH.0000000000000656](https://doi.org/10.1097/SIH.0000000000000656).
- [16] Fulbright program. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.fulbrightprogram.org/>.
- [17] Green, J.Y., Metzl, E.S., & Treviño, A.L. (2023). International online art therapy education program: Evaluating cultural and global perspectives. *Art Therapy*, 40(2), 84-93. doi: [10.1080/07421656.2023.2169564](https://doi.org/10.1080/07421656.2023.2169564).
- [18] Kahn, J., & Pardanani, S. (2024). The evolution of a successful international education program at a community college: Harnessing leadership to create meaningful global engagement at Shoreline Community College. In S. Nako (Ed.), *Narratives and strategies of effective leadership in community colleges* (pp. 218-234). Hershey: IGI Global Scientific Publishing. doi: [10.4018/979-8-3693-1790-7.ch012](https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-1790-7.ch012).
- [19] Kiegaldie, D., Pepe, A., Shaw, L., & Evans, T. (2022). Implementation of a collaborative online international learning program in nursing education: Protocol for a mixed methods study. *BMC Nursing*, 21, article number 252. doi: [10.1186/s12912-022-01031-9](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12912-022-01031-9).
- [20] Li, H., Sun, Y., Barwise, A., Cui, W., Dong, Y., Tekin, A., Yuan, Q., Qiao, L., Gajic, O., & Niven, A. (2022). A novel multimodal needs assessment to inform the longitudinal education program for an international interprofessional critical care team. *BMC Medical Education*, 22, article number 540. doi: [10.1186/s12909-022-03605-2](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-022-03605-2).
- [21] Liu, S. (2024). Urban political economy of elite education: International programs in Chinese elite public high schools. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 45(3), 396-415. doi: [10.1080/01596306.2024.2335006](https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2024.2335006).
- [22] Lopez-Duarte, C., Maley, J.F., & Vidal-Suarez, M.M. (2022). International mobility in higher education: Students' attitude to international credit virtual mobility programs. *European Journal of Higher Education*, 13(4), 468-487. doi: [10.1080/21568235.2022.2068637](https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2022.2068637).
- [23] Macpherson, L., & Collins, M. (2017). Training responsibly to improve global surgical and anaesthesia capacity through institutional health partnerships: A case study. *Tropical Doctor*, 47(1), 73-77. doi: [10.1177/0049475516665999](https://doi.org/10.1177/0049475516665999).
- [24] Maisyarah, M., Untari, S., Chusniyah, T., Adha, M.A., Prestiadi, D., & Ariyanti, N.S. (2024). Strengthening character education planning based on Pancasila value in the international class program. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education*, 12(1), 149-156. doi: [10.11591/ijere.v12i1.24161](https://doi.org/10.11591/ijere.v12i1.24161).
- [25] Marschollek, M., Waller, T., Pape, H.-C., & Doenst, T. (2023). Early career support for biomedical exchange students with an international mentor-to-mentor concept – the biomedical education program (BMEP). *Studies in Health Technology and Informatics*, 298, 34-38. doi: [10.3233/SHTI220903](https://doi.org/10.3233/SHTI220903).
- [26] Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. (2024). Retrieved from <https://mon.gov.ua/en>.
- [27] Morgan, D.A. (2023). Parameters of learning during clinical nursing study abroad: Focused analysis of phenomenological data using a change-transformative learning theory lens. *Nurse Education in Practice*, 73, article number 103831. doi: [10.1016/j.nepr.2023.103831](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nepr.2023.103831).
- [28] Schwartz-Bechet, B., & Duffy, C. (2023). [Teacher education program student-faculty engagement via an international opportunity](#). In *Fostering sustained student-faculty engagement in undergraduate education* (ch. 12). London: Routledge.
- [29] Sukadiono, S. (2024). The effect of knee stretching exercise with knee strengthening exercise on pain, rom, and motion function post knee injury in climbing athletes. *Pakistan Journal of Life and Social Sciences*, 22(1), 251-266. doi: [10.57239/PJLSS-2024-22.1.0020](https://doi.org/10.57239/PJLSS-2024-22.1.0020).
- [30] The Declaration of Helsinki. (2013). Retrieved from <https://www.wma.net/what-we-do/medical-ethics/declaration-of-helsinki/>.
- [31] Vargas-Hernandez, J.G., Guerra, E., & Vargas-González, O.C. (2024). Inter-socio-intercultural entrepreneurship in higher education: A case on a postgraduate program in economics and international business of an indigenous university in Mexico. In M. Gumbo, M. Gaotlhobogwe, C. Pedzisai, Z. Jojo & C. Knaus (Eds.), *Global perspectives on decolonizing postgraduate education* (pp. 109-130). Hershey: IGI Global Scientific Publishing. doi: [10.4018/979-8-3693-1289-6.ch008](https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-1289-6.ch008).
- [32] Walsh, C.A., Borlé, E., Lorenzetti, L., Birks, L., Cerecero, L., & de la Cruz Lugardo, P.I. (2023). International field education: A case study of developing an anti-colonial group study program in Mexico. *International Social Work*, 66(2), 405-418. doi: [10.1177/0020872820976756](https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872820976756).
- [33] Wang, Z., *et al.* (2024). Evaluation of the McGill-Tongji blended education program for teacher leaders in general practice: The importance of partnership and contextualization in international primary care training initiatives. *Health Care Science*, 3(4), 238-248. doi: [10.1002/hcs2.107](https://doi.org/10.1002/hcs2.107).

- [34] Wright, E., & Mulvey, B. (2022). The promised capitals of international high school programmes and the global field of higher education: The case of Shenzhen, China. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 21(2), 87-104. doi: [10.1177/14752409221122070](https://doi.org/10.1177/14752409221122070).
- [35] Zhou, A., Huck, C., & Houdyshell, M.E. (2023). Impact of the Fulbright teaching excellence and achievement program on participating U.S. secondary schools. *Educational Studies*, 50(1), 123-138. doi: [10.1080/03055698.2023.2256919](https://doi.org/10.1080/03055698.2023.2256919).
- [36] Zhou, G., Wang, P., Liu, T., Zhang, J., Li, Y., Fu, C., & Wu, S. (2022). What they learned won't go away: The impacts of an international exchange program on Chinese teacher candidates' understanding of and practice in science education. *ECNU Review of Education*, 5(3), 404-424. doi: [10.1177/2096531120959676](https://doi.org/10.1177/2096531120959676).

Ефективність міжнародних програм обміну в професійній освіті

Оксана Ковтун

Кандидат педагогічних наук, доцент
Університет Григорія Сковороди в Переяславі
08401, вул. Сухомлинського, 30, м. Переяслав, Україна
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9516-8628>

Олександр Ковтун

Кандидат історичних наук, доцент
Університет Григорія Сковороди в Переяславі
08401, вул. Сухомлинського, 30, м. Переяслав, Україна
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0145-7988>

Валентина Крикун

Старший викладач
Університет Григорія Сковороди в Переяславі
08401, вул. Сухомлинського, 30, м. Переяслав, Україна
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9335-6158>

■ **Анотація.** Метою дослідження була оцінка впливу міжнародних програм обміну на підготовку майбутніх фахівців. Методологія включала аналіз даних з опитувань і інтерв'ю з учасниками програм обміну, яке дало змогу порівняти результати до та після проходження програми. Важливим аспектом стало те, що студенти змогли визначити рівень задоволеності умовами та досвідом, отриманим під час участі у програмі. Результати показали, що участь у міжнародних програмах значно підвищує рівень професійних компетенцій і розширює можливості для працевлаштування. Дослідження виявило, що такі програми сприяють розвитку міжкультурної комунікації і розширенню світогляду учасників, що особливо важливо в умовах глобалізації. Було встановлено також певні труднощі, зокрема, пов'язані з адаптацією учасників до нових умов навчання та роботи за кордоном. У дослідженні підтверджено, що міжнародні програми обміну є ефективним інструментом підвищення якості професійної освіти і розвитку глобальних компетенцій, проте вимагають вдосконалення підтримки учасників у процесі адаптації. Висвітлено важливість підтримки з боку навчальних закладів і роботодавців, що допомагає учасникам максимально ефективно використовувати отримані знання та навички після повернення. Важливим аспектом стало вивчення впливу культурних відмінностей на навчальний процес і професійну діяльність, що дозволило визначити ключові фактори успішної адаптації. Пропозиції щодо вдосконалення програм включають підвищення рівня підготовки учасників до участі у програмах, а також забезпечення більш тривалої підтримки після завершення обміну. Результати дослідження вказали на значний потенціал міжнародних програм обміну для професійного розвитку

■ **Ключові слова:** міжкультурна співпраця; навчальний процес; стратегія навчання; підвищення кваліфікації; розвиток фахівців; можливості та ризики