ONLINE SOFTWARE FOR ERASMUS+ IN EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract

Exchange programs are of a great importance nowadays; they help to improve employment, language skills, and international relations, and try to reduce intolerance and discrimination against minorities and migrants, which is one of a current and important topic of today. There is a growing interest in exchange study programs from year to year, and there is a greater administrative burden on institutions that implement exchange study programs. For this reason, different online applications have been developed to manage exchange study programs. These applications operate electronically and institutions and participants of exchange programs can save time by using them as they minimize administration and bureaucracy. The objectives of the research is to analyse the software (online) for mobility management, and based on the analysis, a suitable application for Slovak universities is proposed.

The paper deals with exchange study programs, mainly with the Erasmus+ program and its development in the European Union (EU). There are identified online applications that serve to manage Erasmus+ (Erasmus without paper, EMREX, Online Learning Agreement, DreamApply, DreamFoundation, and more). These online applications serve to facilitate the whole mobility of students abroad and make the sign up process easier. Candidates can sign up for mobility directly in the online application environment where agreements and other administration of application is automatically at disposal. The work of coordinators who are in charge of the program is more effective as well, and thanks to these online applications, the management of the program is much easier. Participants who has finished their mobility abroad, they fill in the report in the online application with direct connection to the Mobility Tool, software provided by EU.

After collecting the necessary information concerning Erasmus+ and management software, analysis and interpretation of the research results were conducted. The collection of the primary data of the marketing research was carried out by electronic questionnaire inquiry. Respondents were the creators of the applications. The basis for our research to be relevantly processed and evaluated was the assumption that all respondents would send us a response, which was successful. The research includes an analysis of the usability of identified online applications to management mobilities in those EU countries, which are involved in the Erasmus+ program. The main output of the paper is to identify which of the investigated online applications are most used in the EU. We found out that the most used online application to manage exchange programs is the Online Learning Agreement, which uses an average of 50,000 students per year, in over 25 countries and at more than 300 universities. Partial result is also a comparison of the most used online software in the European Union with the Slovak software studyabroad.sk. We found that applications provide the same capabilities. The essential difference is that in the studyabroad.sk application, the student can choose only the mobility for which his school has a bilateral agreement. In the Online Learning Agreement, students can prepare their own learning agreements.

Keywords: Erasmus+, online, application, software, Mobility Tool, studyabroad.sk.

1 INTRODUCTION

We cannot talk about student mobility as a modern phenomenon because it has always been a part of universities that are considered to be international institutions. The main author of student mobility is Erasmus Rotterdam, a Dutch thinker (1466-1536) who was born in Rotterdam but studied in various European countries such as England, France, Italy and Switzerland. According to OSN for education, science and culture, the student mobility is a period of study outside the country in which the student resides. This study lasts a certain period, and the student returns to his / her home country after that time. [1] According to UNESCO, a student who is involved in student mobility can be understood as a student who has crossed the borders of his home country and moved to another country for a certain period in order to study. [2] The United States of America has been one of the most popular countries of foreign students for long. A great boom in student mobility in the USA occurred after the Second
World War and the country’s greatest increase in foreign students was recorded in seventy and eighty years. [3,4]

In the first period (1987-1994) in Europe, the individual programs were separated and independent. Among the main activities of this pilot period belong Lingua – a program for teachers and foreign language learners. There was also a program to promote student and teacher mobility within partner universities - Erasmus, a program to support internships in partner enterprises abroad - Comett, and a program, which focuses on cooperation between Education and Training – Petra. Also the Force program which puts emphasis on vocational training or a program supporting projects among youth partner organizations, that are not only concerned with education but also with multicultural education and extracurricular activities - Youth for Europe. [5]

In the second period (1995-2001), the separation is abandoned and three educational programs emerged - Socrates, Leonardo and Youth. Since 2007, programs for higher education, vocational training and support for educational institutions have been transferred under the Lifelong Learning Program (2007-2013). The most fundamental Youth in Action program aimed to promote leisure time activities, which was open to all young people, irrespective of their level of education or social or cultural origin, fell under it. [6]

In 2014, a new European program called Erasmus+ erode, which substitutes and covers the actions of all existing training programs. Erasmus+ is a new program for the period from 2014 to 2020 in the fields of education, training, youth and sport. Its aim is to contribute to the establishment of a European policy strategy on growth, employment, social equality. [7] The objective of Erasmus + is to improve employment in the EU, social equality, inclusion, and to promote the development of partners in higher education. [8] The duration of student mobility may be at least 3 months and a maximum of 12 months. Each student can participate in the exchange program for a maximum of 12 months at each one level of education. [9]

Participating Countries [10, 11]:

- Member States of the European Union (Bulgaria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Denmark, France, Finland, Netherlands, Greece, Lithuania, Ireland, Luxembourg, Latvia, Malta, Hungary, Poland, Germany, Austria, Portugal, Slovakia, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Great Britain, Italy, Croatia, Macedonia).
- EEA countries (Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein).
- Candidate countries (Turkey).

The EU provides grants for study, practice or volunteering abroad. The grants help people develop their employability, skills and cultural sub consciousness, as well as encouraging young people to participate in democratic life. Compared to previous years, Erasmus + provides stronger support for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. [12]

Figure 1. Outgoing and incoming employees; (Source [12])

Figure 1 shows the difference between 2008 and 2014 in the number of outgoing and incoming employees; we can see significantly higher numbers in 2014.

Figure 2. Top 5 sending institutions and Top 5 receiving institutions (Source [12])
In Figure 2 we have the top 5 sending and receiving institutions in Slovakia and in both cases there are the same universities.

![Figure 3. Top 5 sending countries and Top 5 receiving countries (Source [12])](image)

Figure 3 shows the top 5 sending and receiving countries, in both cases there are the same 4 countries with a change in sending Turkey and receiving Germany.

If we talk about the latest Erasmus+ statistics in Slovakia in education mobility and internships, 11,184 participants took part in 338 Slovak projects in 2016, using a total of € 19.03 million in grants. These are the universities, which send abroad the most students within the Erasmus + program - Comenius University in Bratislava, University of Economics in Bratislava and Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica. The most frequent host countries of the Slovak Republic were the Czech Republic, Poland and Spain. 3849 people in Slovakia used the program for study or internship in a foreign company in 2016. On the contrary, 1992 students and participants of internship came to Slovakia in 2016. [13]

2 METHODOLOGY

The main aim of this paper is to analyse the use of identified applications for the management of the Erasmus+ program in the European Union countries involved in this program, and to identify which application is most widely used in the European Union. The partial goal of the research is to compare the possibilities of the most used application in the European Union, and the Slovak application studyabroad.sk

For this purpose, a marketing research was carried out in which we focused on applications that are used for the management of the Erasmus+ program, and we analysed their use in the European Union countries involved in the Erasmus+ program. Marketing research was conducted in two basic phases. In the first, preparatory phase of marketing research, we dedicated ourselves to identify the research problem, research goals, and assumptions [14]. Furthermore, we have outlined the orientation analysis of the situation, the preparation of the questionnaire and the research plan. Research problem: Low use of Erasmus+ managed applications (software) in European Union countries.

Marketing Research Goals:

- To find out the average number of users per application over a year in the European Union.
- To find out how many countries use individual applications across the European Union.
- To find out how many universities use individual applications within the European Union.

Based on our chosen research problem and defining the research goals of marketing research, we analysed the situation. First, we have brought the theoretical knowledge of exchange programs and the Erasmus+ program managed by our applications. Furthermore, we have defined and characterized the applications, and their possibilities of use. The collection of the primary data of the marketing research was carried out by electronic questionnaire inquiry. The survey was attended by 6 pre-selected respondents, represented by the authors of the investigated applications. The basis for our research to be relevantly processed and evaluated was the assumption that all 6 respondents would send us a response, which eventually succeeded. We analysed and processed the data using Microsoft Excel 2007.

3 RESULTS

Applications that serve to facilitate student mobility abroad make easier the sign up procedure for mobility abroad. Those interested can sign up for mobility directly in the application environment, which saves them time with various contracts and further administration. This software also streamline the work of coordinators who are in charge of the program, and make the whole management of the program
Participants also after mobility fill the special form in the application, which data are sent to the Mobility Tool. Mobility Tool is an online electronic tool created and launched during 2015 by the European Commission, primarily for the needs of Erasmus+ grant recipients. Mobility Tool helps grant recipients to manage the whole project. The Mobility Tool lists all partners and participants who participate in the mobility, and who update, complete budget information and report in accordance with the grant agreement.

Studyabroad.sk is an internet application that is based mainly on the complexity of the offered information. With studyabroad.sk it is possible to administer a large amount of data, make them transparent and adapt to the requirements of the client. One of the goals of studyabroad.sk is to facilitate and streamline the work of the candidate and coordinator when applying for foreign mobility. Creating a transparent environment for all applicants and unifying the administration of the application. [15]

Erasmus without paper is a community of 14 partner institutions composed of public institutions, higher education organizations and companies from 8 European countries with the potential to disseminate information to more than 400 universities from 36 European countries along with 11 associate partners. They have taken the initiative to exchange information about students on mobility in an electronic way by providing an evidence-based feasibility study with different scenarios of usage and a practical solution to connect all existing systems in a single network. The EWP network is the first attempt to standardize the transmission of student data across Europe. [16]

The purpose of EMREX is to electronically transfer student records and results between higher education institutions in Europe. EMREX will facilitate the electronic transfer of learning outcomes from the host university to the home university where the student is studying. The greatest benefit of EMREX is the increased availability, quality, and reliability of student information and their record of achievements; EMREX also provides less risk of falsified certificates. EMREX aims to test new ways to manage student administration, facilitate mobility and thus promote a higher level of university student mobility, and promote more effective recognition of prior education. [17]

The Online Learning Agreement was developed by the European University Foundation and the Erasmus Student Network for 21st Century Mobile Students. The aim of the project is to enable students to prepare their education agreements within an on-line system, that will then enable them to contact the coordinators of higher education institutions to complete the document, to approve it and sign it online. Therefore, this process replaces a paper preparation that relies on delivering the documents by post on time for further signing procedure, to an online system that allows students to take a considerable amount of time to prepare their studies abroad and gives more flexibility and effectiveness when needed to revise the education contract.

Management of the DreamApply Student Application is designed specifically to organize student applications. The goal of DreamApply is to provide support from the moment the potential candidate is interested in the mobility until he / she starts studying at the institution. DreamApply can process applications for full-time students or short courses such as summer schools and etc. With this application, you can save up to 60% of your administrative time. [18]

DreamFoundation's goal is to make the whole process of applying for study abroad easy, affordable and comfortable. Through DreamFoundation, people can register at more than 50 universities in Europe, which offer approximately 4,000 full-time study programs in English [19].

We found that 2 applications out of 6 have an average number of users per year ranging from 25,001-50,000, one from 10,001-25,000, another from 3,001-10,000, and the last 2 from 501-3,000. (Figure 4). 1 software from 6 is used in 26 and more countries, 2 applications are used in 16-25 countries, the other 2 are used in 6-15 countries and the last one is used in one country (Figure 5). 2 of 6 software are used at 301 and more universities, 1 application is used at universities from 151 to 300, another application is used at 51-150 universities, another at interval 21-50 universities, and the last software is used at 1-5 universities (Figure 6).
4 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the data analysis we found that 3 out of 6 applications (software) have more than 10,000 users on average in one year. The most frequently used applications in terms of the number of users are Erasmus without paper and Online Learning Agreement. 3 of 6 applications are used in less than 16 countries. The application that is used in most countries is the Online Learning Agreement, and is used in 26 or more countries. Conversely, the application that is used in the least countries is the studyabroad.sk application, which is only used in Slovakia. The most widely used application is used at more than 300 universities, which are these two applications: Erasmus without paper and Online Learning Agreement.
Based on the analysis of the data obtained from all questions, we can determine the most used application from all the applications examined. The most widely used software is the Online Learning Agreement application, which is used by most users, along with the Erasmus without paper application, and is used at most universities. The difference between them is in the number of countries that use these applications. Erasmus without paper is used in 16-25 countries, while the Online Learning Agreement is used in more than 25 countries. Based on this difference, we can determine the Online Learning Agreement as the most widely used application.

When we compare the most widely used application in Europe and the Slovak studyabroad.sk software, the biggest difference is of course the number of users, countries and universities that use these applications. When we compare the principle of the operation of these applications, in the studyabroad.sk application, after registering on their website, the student chooses the type of mobility he / she wants to participate in, then chooses his / her school and the field he / she is studying, and then displays the countries to which he / she can travel for a study stay. In the Online Learning Agreement, students can prepare their learning agreements within their online system, allowing them to contact higher education institution coordinators to complete, approve and sign the online document.

There is more interest in exchange programs every year, the annual reports by the European Commission show that the number of Europeans participating in exchange mobility’s is higher each year. Applications that are used to manage exchange programs are important and greatly simplify the whole process and management of mobility.

REFERENCES


