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LINGUISTIC CAPITAL AS A KEY OF ACCESS TO ACADEMIC AND CULTURAL OPPORTUNITIES: THE ERASMUS+ EXPERIENCE

CAPITALUL LINGVISTIC - CHEIA DE ACCES LA OPORTUNITĂȚI ACADEMICE ȘI CULTURALE: EXPERIENȚA ERASMUS+

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Abstract. *În cadrul prezentului studiu, „capitalul lingvistic" este abordat ca o resursă esențială care facilitează accesul la oportunități academice și culturale în contextul mobilității internaționale. Scopul cercetării este de a analiza rolul capitalului lingvistic în valorificarea oportunităților academice și culturale oferite de programul Erasmus+. Pornind de la conceptul lui Bourdieu și de la literatura recentă privind rolul limbilor străine în globalizare, lucrarea examinează modul în care competențele lingvistice influențează integrarea și participarea în programul Erasmus+. Prin utilizarea unei metode mixte, cercetarea combină analiza literaturii de specialitate cu date cantitative obținute prin aplicarea unui chestionar unui eșantion de 126 de respondenți, format din studenți și cadre didactice, participanți și potențiali participanți la mobilitate internațională. Analiza datelor evidențiază relația dintre nivelul competențelor lingvistice, utilizarea limbilor străine în contexte reale și accesul la oportunități academice, sociale și profesionale. Rezultatele indică o corelație pozitivă între nivelul capitalului lingvistic și gradul de integrare în mediul academic internațional, precum și participarea activă la activități educaționale și interculturale. De asemenea, utilizarea limbilor străine în contexte practice contribuie semnificativ la dezvoltarea competențelor de comunicare și la extinderea oportunităților academice și profesionale, atât pentru studenți, cât și pentru cadrele didactice. În ansamblu, studiul demonstrează că capitalul lingvistic reprezintă un factor determinant în valorificarea experienței Erasmus+, influențând direct integrarea, performanța academică și accesul la oportunități într-un mediu internațional.*
Keywords: *capital lingvistic, mobilitate academică, Erasmus+, experiență interculturală, competențe lingvistice.*
JEL CLASSIFICATION: I23, I24, F22, Z10

INTRODUCTION

Academic mobility is a key part of higher education, offering experiences beyond traditional learning. The Erasmus+ programme supports personal, cultural, and linguistic development by requiring adaptation to new academic contexts, interaction with diverse cultural groups, and active use of foreign languages. Linguistic competence functions as a form of capital, facilitating access to the programme and integration into international academic environments. Using language skills in real situations transforms theoretical knowledge into practical ability, enhancing adaptability and intercultural awareness. This study examines the role of linguistic capital in accessing academic and cultural opportunities and its impact on communication competence development in international settings.

CONTENT

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of linguistic capital, introduced by Pierre Bourdieu, positions language as more than a communication tool, highlighting its role as a form of symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991). Building on this perspective, Hirbu conceptualises linguistic capital as a set of linguistic skills possessed by individuals, and which can be strategically employed to attain social, cultural or economic benefits. As language is inherently "a complex and dynamic construct", linguistic capital extends beyond knowledge of the vocabulary or grammar to include the ability to navigate different

linguistic registers, adapt to various communication contexts and engage effectively in diverse social interactions (Hirbu, Dombrovschi, 2025).

Ofelia García (2009, p. 45) extends this view, defining linguistic capital as the repertoire of practices used across social contexts, emphasizing both proficiency and effective application in intercultural interactions, especially in academic mobility.

In the context of the Republic of Moldova's European integration, linguistic capital overlaps with political and cultural dimensions. According to Stella Hirbu, multilingualism and cross-cultural dialogue are fundamental pillars of the EU's identity, serving not only as instruments of cohesion but also as mechanisms for enhancing labour mobility and employment (Hirbu, 2025, pp. 200-201). An analysis of EU language policy shows that linguistic capital is increasingly viewed as a strategic asset in the knowledge economy, aligning with broader objectives of innovation and competitiveness.

According to Kuteeva, academic mobility fosters this capital, as students develop linguistic and intercultural adaptability through practical experiences (Kuteeva, Airey, 2014, p. 62). In this regard, within the Erasmus+ programme, linguistic capital functions not merely as a theoretical advantage, but as a key enabler of social integration, participation in intercultural activities, and access to global academic and professional opportunities.

ERASMUS+ PROGRAMME – AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF LINGUISTIC AND INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCES

The Erasmus+ programme is an initiative of the European Union that provides students, trainees, and educational staff with the opportunity to study, participate in training programmes, and engage in professional activities abroad. Initially launched in 1987, the programme has evolved into a complex mechanism that supports academic mobility, institutional cooperation, and the development of participants' linguistic and intercultural competences (Erasmus+ European Commission, 2024). Erasmus+ includes several key actions, among which the most relevant for students is **Key Action 1 – Mobility of Individuals**, which facilitates participation in study mobility and international internships. The programme emphasizes not only academic performance, but also the development of linguistic and intercultural competences, which are considered essential for integration into an international academic environment.

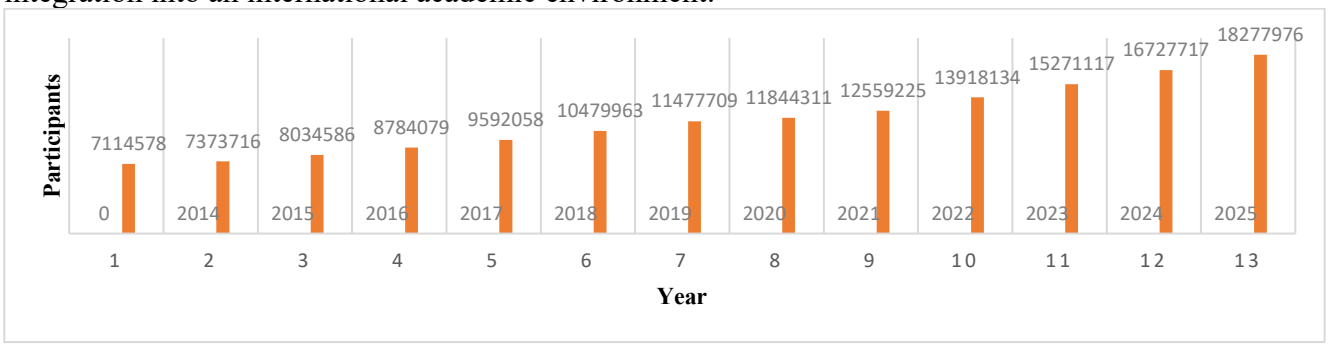


Figure 1. Participants in learning mobility since 1987

Source: Author's elaboration based on Erasmus+ European Commission data (2024). Available *at: https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/resources-and-tools/factsheets-statistics*

The data indicate a steady increase in participants, reflecting growing interest in international education and linguistic competence development. Engagement in academic activities in foreign languages and interaction with diverse cultural groups contribute to transforming linguistic skills into active linguistic capital.

THE ROLE OF LINGUISTIC CAPITAL IN ACCESSING ERASMUS+ OPPORTUNITIES: A QUESTIONNAIRE-BASED STUDY

To examine the role of linguistic capital in accessing academic and cultural opportunities within the Erasmus+ programme, a questionnaire was conducted with 126 respondents. The sample included both in Erasmus+ participants (76.2%) and potential applicants (23.8%), providing a

comprehensive perspective on both actual and anticipated experiences. Respondents reported varying levels of linguistic competence: 11.1% at beginner level, 39.7% intermediate, and 49.2% advanced. The results indicate that a significant proportion of respondents possess advanced competences, supporting effective participation in international academic environments, while a smaller group of beginners may face integration challenges.

The analysis of multilingual capacity shows that 8.7% of respondents speak one foreign language, 31% speak two, and 60.3% speak three or more languages (Figure 2). This highlights multilingualism as a key dimension of linguistic capital, facilitating adaptability and access to diverse academic and cultural contexts.

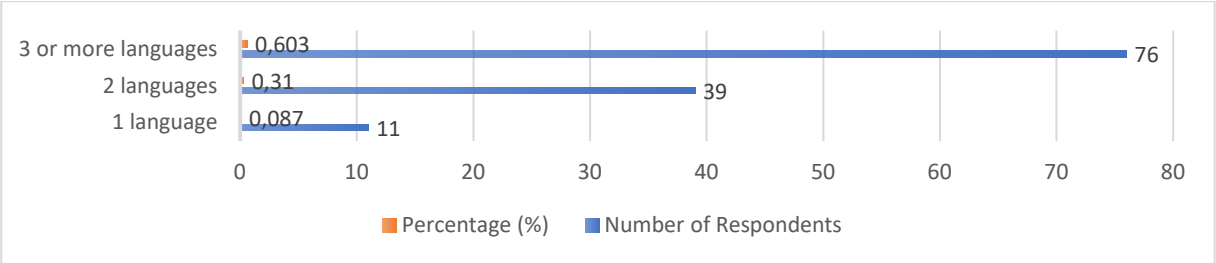


Figure 2: Number of foreign languages spoken at a functional level (1, 2, ≥3).
Source: Author's elaboration.

Regarding the perceived influence of language skills on Erasmus+ participation, 39.7% of respondents indicated a very significant impact, 27% a significant impact, 16.7% a moderate impact, 8.7% a slight impact, and 7.9% no impact. These findings confirm that linguistic competences are widely perceived as a decisive factor in accessing and successfully engaging in international mobility, although other factors may also contribute.

Overall, findings confirm that linguistic capital is central to Erasmus+ mobility, as competence level and multilingual capacity affect access and engagement in intercultural environments. This supports viewing language as capital that enhances participation and performance in global higher education. The questionnaire showed practical benefits: cultural experiences (78%) and academic success (72.2%), networking (70%) and career opportunities (69%), with social integration at 46% and only 10.3% reporting other benefits. Linguistic capital thus primarily supports academic, cultural, and professional outcomes.

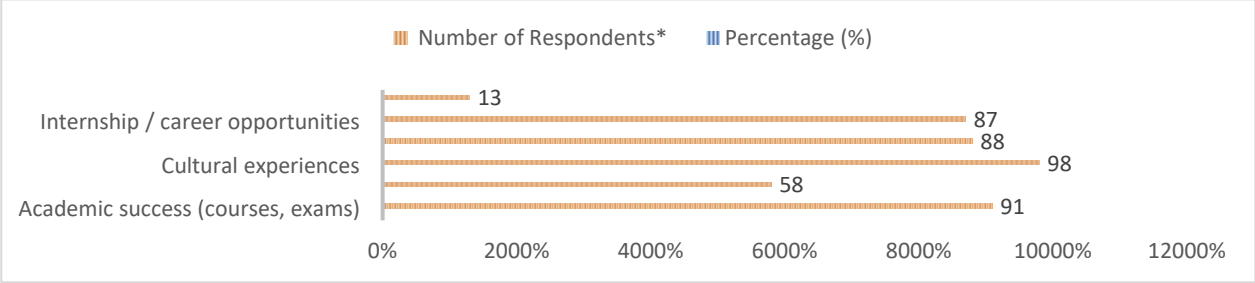


Figure 3: The impact of language skills on access to academic opportunities within the Erasmus+ programme
Source: Author's elaboration

Regarding skill development, 52.4% reported very significant improvement and 19.8% significant improvement in linguistic competences, while only 5.6% noted no improvement, showing Erasmus+ transforms theoretical knowledge into practical skills. Additionally, 82.5% considered linguistic capital essential for academic mobility and future opportunities, with 11.9% acknowledging partial importance. These findings confirm that linguistic capital is both a prerequisite and an outcome of international mobility, supporting access, integration, and academic, cultural, and professional development.

CONCLUSIONS

The study demonstrates that linguistic capital is a key factor in accessing academic, cultural, and professional opportunities within the Erasmus+ programme. Higher levels of language competence and multilingual capacity support academic engagement, social integration, and participation in cultural experiences. Language skills not only enable mobility participation but are also enhanced through the Erasmus+ experience, creating a reinforcing cycle between linguistic capital and international exposure. Respondents highlighted that academic success, cultural experiences, networking, and career opportunities are all influenced by linguistic abilities. The majority also recognized linguistic capital as essential for future mobility and professional development, confirming its role as both a functional and strategic resource. These findings suggest that universities should prioritize language development to maximize students' benefits from international mobility and prepare them for global academic and professional environments.

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