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Exchange Students in Teacher Education. Empirical Evidence on Characteristics and Motive Structures

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Abstract

This paper reports on a study on characteristics and motives of exchange students in teacher education. The results of this study suggest that exchange students in teacher education should be considered as a specific type of exchange students: Whereas the existing literature depicts an appropriate picture of exchange students in teacher education regarding gender, socio-economic background and motive structure, it does not correspond in terms of age, affiliation to minority groups and facets of intercultural competence. Practical implications for the design of and access to exchange programs in teacher education as well as implications for further research are discussed.

Keywords: Teacher education, exchange programs, exchange students, study abroad, higher education.

INTRODUCTION

Exchange programs are becoming increasingly popular. The number of exchange students has been on the rise in the last decades. In the European Union, the number of exchange students participating in the ERASMUS (EuRopean Community Action Scheme for Mobilty of University Students) exchange has increased from 3'244 in the academic year 1987/88 to 168'193 in 2008/09 (2010). In the USA, the participation rate has increased by 150 % in the last 10 years (Salisbury et al., 2009, p. 120). The same trend may be observed in teacher education (Mahon, 2010): Thus, participation in exchange programs is becoming more and more popular in teacher education.

Two goals are being pursued by participating in exchange programs: On the one hand, from the institutional perspective, exchange programs promise to provide an important contribution to the internationalisation of the university environment. From

the individual perspective, on the other hand, exchange programs are also aimed towards specific developments of the participants. As a review of the available research literature shows, the most obvious individual effects of exchange programs which can be identified are personal development, language skills and intercultural sensitivity. However, evidence can also be found that not all students benefit from exchange experiences to the same degree (for an overview see Leutwyler and Lottenbach, 2011).

In relation to teacher education, it may be argued that personal development including more self-confidence, increased openness to foreign attitudes, more flexibility, broadened foreign language skills, as well as a pronounced intercultural sensitivity are beneficial for the profession, too. The importance of these competencies and attitudes is indisputable for teachers – they are not, however, teaching-specific competencies or attitudes. Research on the teaching-specific benefit of exchange programs is rarely available. The few studies that focus explicitly on the benefits for teachers suggest that participants

- increase their professional self-efficacy (Pence and Macgillivray, 2008),
- raise their appreciation of cultural diversity in

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schools (Kambutu and Nganga, 2008; Rapoport, 2008),

- develop communication skills with children from cultural minorities (Chieffo and Griffiths, 2004; Wiggins et al., 2007),
- deepen their reflection on specific cultural imprints of schooling and teaching (Leutwyler and Lottenbach, 2011), and
- strengthen their global orientation in teaching (Willard-Holt, 2001).

However, these findings emerge from data in the form of retrospective causal attribution: Former exchange students retrospectively attribute the reported effects to their experiences during their exchange stays. This method is problematic when the diverse and complex interdependences of pre-conditions and process experiences are taken into account. To what extent, for example, was the ability and willingness to reflect developed before the exchange stay and to what extent did this skill develop during the exchange stay? This is hardly reliably measurable by an ex post subjective evaluation. Against this background, the 'causal sequence problem' - the problem to determine the causal direction because a strong selection bias can hardly be avoided (Pettigrew 2004, p. 772) - has to be taken seriously. Given the empirical data, we may absolutely assume that the exchange students had, for example, a higher professional self-efficacy and a stronger appreciation of cultural diversity even before they left. Perhaps that is why they were interested in a study abroad in the first place. Considering this causal sequence problem, the question arises not only which effects may justifiably be attributed to exchange stays, but also *who* the exchange students are and what their motives are: Which students participate in exchange programs, how do they differ from non-participating students? And why are they interested in a study abroad? The available literature gives the following answers:

In terms of *gender*, a vast body of evidence indicates a gender gap with clearly higher participation rates in study abroad programs for female students than for their male counterparts (e.g. Goldstein and Kim, 2006; Di Pietro and Page, 2008; Salisbury et al., 2009). This gap seems to be stable within different racial or ethnic categories (Thomas and McMahon, 1998, p. 58), however, the extent of this gap varies considerably between different countries and is even reversed in the single case of Poland (Souto Otero and McCoshan, 2006, p. 4). Some authors argue that this gender gap may be explained by gender differences in choices of majors (Heublein et al., 2008): Female students major more frequently in humanities and in social sciences; and these majors are historically overrepresented in a study abroad (Salisbury et al., 2009, p. 121). This may be due

to more flexible study programs in these majors and because exchange stays are often integral parts of linguistic or cultural studies.

In terms of *socio-economic background*, the literature clearly shows that exchange students 'come largely from privileged socio-economic backgrounds' (Souto Otero, 2008, p. 146) and form, therefore, a 'fairly selected group as compared to the average students' (Teichler and Jahr, 2001, cited in *ib.*, p 147). These stable findings, however, must not be ascribed only to better financial opportunities to cover additional expenses or a prolonged study time. Rather, parents of exchange students are more highly-qualified and therefore more conscious of the importance of education in foreign languages and other cultures (European Commission, 2000; Di Pietro and Page, 2008; Souto Otero, 2008). In this respect, the level of the parents' education shapes student expectations about studying abroad and influences the students' aspirations to study abroad (Salisbury et al., 2009, p. 133). It may be shown that social and cultural capital accumulated even prior to attending college influences the intention to study abroad (*ib.*). For that reason, Souto Otero and McCoshan conclude that barriers to participate in exchange programmes' are not only economic but truly socio-economic (2006, p. 16). It has to be noted, in this respect, that important reasons for not participating are not only socio-economic but also social living conditions such as partners, friends and family (Heublein et al., 2008).

Furthermore, the available evidence indicates that minority students (i.e. race or ethnicity) are clearly underrepresented in exchange programs (Thomas and McMahon, 1998; Salisbury et al., 2009) and that exchange students tend to be older than regular students (Di Pietro and Page, 2008; with considerable differences between countries, see Souto Otero and McCoshan, 2006).

Only few studies deal with *personality traits, attitudes and experiences* of exchange students. The sparse empirical evidence suggests that before leaving, exchange students are more open to diversity and to new experiences than regular students (Salisbury et al., 2009; Zschocke, 2007). Goldstein and Kim (2006) show, furthermore, that exchange students declare lower levels of ethnocentrism and prejudice and a higher interest in foreign languages and higher expectations of the exchange stay (in terms of social and personal benefits). Therefore, they conclude that expectations and facets of intercultural competence play 'a far more critical role in determining who studied abroad than academic or career factors' (p. 517).

To sum up, we know quite well who the exchange students are in terms of gender, socio-economic background or age. But we only have a first glimpse in

terms of their personality traits, attitudes and experiences.

Regarding the *motives to study abroad*, considerable evidence can be found that exchange students value more personal and cultural aspects of their experience than professional or academic ones (Oppen et al., 1990; Souto Otero, 2008; Lottenbach, 2009). However, some authors show that the reasons to study abroad mostly comprise a conglomerate of very different aspects, including the intention to develop language skills, to enhance employment possibilities, to experience a different culture and to acquire specific professional competencies (Di Pietro and Page, 2008; Heublein et al., 2008). This reflects the fact that the initiators of study abroad programs consider both the social and cultural aspects (in the sense of intercultural understanding) as well as professional and economic needs (in the sense of improving human capital) as core rationale for these programs (Souto Otero, 2008, p. 142). Souto Otero, furthermore, suggests that the prevalent motives for study abroad differs between countries: In his data, exchange students from higher income countries tend to study abroad for 'consumption' whereas exchange students from lower income countries tend to study abroad for 'investment' in search of better employment opportunities (ibid., p. 150).

The motives to study abroad are different from the decision process to study abroad. Salisbury and colleagues adapted decision-making theories to the context of a study abroad (Salisbury et al., 2009; Salisbury et al., 2010; 2011) and showed how students' social, cultural and economic capital influences the decision whether they conceive a study abroad as a plausible or preferred option and how a 'lack of resources shapes student expectations about studying abroad' (Salisbury et al., 2009, p. 133). With this approach, it may be shown that the decision to study abroad is embedded in a 'broader context within which students develop tentative plans or aspirations regarding possible educational and career goals' (ibid., p. 123). In the context of teacher education, this finding has to be interpreted differently: As teacher education prepares prospective professionals for a very locally oriented job market, a possible international experience may not correspond to aspirations for subsequent employment in an international environment. There is no evidence so far that would suggest that teachers with international experience during their professional preparation have better employment opportunities. It may be hypothesized, therefore, that the motive structure to study abroad differs in teacher education compared to degree courses preparing for jobs in more internationally oriented job

markets.

The sparse evidence regarding the motives to study abroad in teacher education suggests that language acquisition seems to be the main professional motive. Equally important is the interest in getting to know new places and people and the possibility to travel, to experience a different culture and to develop personally (Jaritz, 2011; Lottenbach, 2009). When thinking about a possible destination to study abroad, it seems to be important for many students that this destination is a 'flashy place' (Lottenbach, 2009, p. 8). Therefore, personal experiences seem to have a greater driving force in teacher education than professional reasons such as to learn about different educational systems and approaches, to extend their professional horizon or to widen their intercultural competencies.

To conclude, we know quite well that the motives to study abroad comprise a conglomerate of different aspects such as personal, cultural, professional and economic aspects. But we do not know to what extent these findings are valid for teacher education students embedded in a very locally oriented job market. Moreover, the characteristics and motives of exchange students in teacher education are not yet sufficiently based on a stable empirical foundation. The present contribution aims to add evidence to this matter by answering the following questions: To what extent are the generally known characteristics of exchange students also valid for exchange students in teacher education? Which personality traits, attitudes, prior experiences and which teaching-specific competencies are appropriate to distinguish exchange students from regular students in teacher education? And what are the driving motives of teacher education students to do an exchange stay abroad?

The answers to these questions will contribute to a better understanding of the role of exchange programs in teacher education. With findings on specific characteristics of exchange students, it will be clarified to what extent the actual exchange students correspond to the target group, respectively to what extent specific groups of teacher education students are underrepresented and do not make use of the learning potential in exchange stays. With findings on motive structures of exchange students in teacher education, it will be possible to understand the role that teacher education students ascribe to exchange programs. This may shed light on how to promote, support and strengthen exchange programs specifically in teacher education. The next section will describe the methodical approach to find answers to the above mentioned questions.

METHODS

The empirical basis of this report represents a part of a data set that was collected in the context of a quasi-experimental study: Comprehensive data of an experimental group (with students who completed an exchange) and a control group (with students who studied at the home university concurrently) were gathered. With regard to the present research questions, only the baseline data of the sample is considered. This data was collected before the members of the experimental group left for their exchange stays. Therefore, it allows us to compare the experimental group to the control group at the time before the departure of the experimental group. This subsample includes 260 teacher education students of the Swiss Universities of Teacher Education Bern, Fribourg, St. Gallen, Thurgau, Valais, Central Switzerland and Zurich ($n = 139$ with a response rate of 68.8% in the control group; $n = 121$ with a response rate of 73.8% in the experimental group) (With the number of 121 participating exchange students, 58.1% of all exchange students of Universities of Teacher Education in Switzerland are represented (cohep Fachgruppe Mobilität, 2010).

This data was collected with a questionnaire that included (a) measures regarding demographics (such as gender, age, socio-economic background); (b) measures regarding personality traits, attitudes and prior experiences; (c) measures regarding teaching-specific competencies and (d) measures regarding the motives to study abroad (whereas this last section was answered only by the experimental group). Measures regarding *personality traits, attitudes and prior experiences* contained a reduced scale 'openness' of the NEO Personality Inventory (the German version by Borkenau and Ostendorf, 1993, 3 items; Cronbachs' $\alpha = .60$), single items on interest in other cultures and on commitment to social justice, on frequency of staying abroad and on frequency and intensity of intercultural contacts at home. With these measures, the lack of evidence regarding the role of personality traits, attitudes and prior experiences is treated.

Measures regarding *teaching-specific competencies* consider the expectation that facets of intercultural competence play 'a far more critical role in determining who studied abroad than academic or career factors' (Goldstein and Kim, 2006, p. 517). Considering the focus of the present study in teacher education, the included measures focused on teaching-specific facets of intercultural competence: A first scale covered the appre-

ciation of cultural diversity in schools. This scale was developed referring very roughly to the Xenophobia-scale of Ziebertz and van der Tuin (2008) and contained 6 items with a Cronbachs' α of .80. A sample item of this scale is: 'The Swiss school system would work much better if there were no immigrant pupils' (reversed item; $r_{it} = 0.67$). A second scale covered the self-efficacy for dealing with cultural diversity in schools. This scale was derived from the well-established scale for teachers' self-efficacy from Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1999) and was extended with some specific new items. It contained 6 items with a Cronbachs' α of .79. A sample item of this scale is: 'Even if I teach a class with a large cultural diversity, I am able to respond to the different individual needs' ($r_{it} = 0.61$). In addition to these facets of intercultural competence, the motivation to teach, the flexibility in teaching and professional self-efficacy (in general, not specific for dealing with cultural diversity in schools) were covered. The scale 'motivation to teach' covers the conviction that teaching is the proper career choice. This scale was developed especially for this study and contained 6 items with a Cronbachs' α of .68. A sample item of this scale is: 'Although teaching is a challenging profession, it is my choice of job' ($r_{it} = 0.43$). The scale 'flexibility in teaching' covers someone's belief to what extent he or she feels comfortable when facing unknown or unforeseen situations in schools. This scale was also developed especially for this study and contained 4 items with a Cronbachs' α of .72. A sample item of this scale is: 'I feel awkward if I can't perform my teaching practice as I have planned' (reversed item; $r_{it} = 0.42$). The scale 'professional self-efficacy' contained 7 items adopted from the well-established scales from Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1999) and from Dellinger *et al.* (2008). A sample item of this scale is: 'I know that I am able to plan good lessons on a wide variety of topics' ($r_{it} = 0.49$; Cronbachs' $\alpha = .75$). Finally, measures regarding the *motives to study abroad* included single items that have been developed on the basis of prior findings by Lottenbach (2009) and Jaritz (2011).

These measures were compared between the experimental group (hereafter referred to as 'exchange students') and the control group (hereafter referred to as 'regular students'). Regarding measures with Likert-scales, the arithmetic means were compared by adopting t-tests for independent samples; regarding measures with nominal answer formats, frequencies were compared by adopting Pearson's chi-square tests. All statistical procedures were conducted with the software SPSS 18.0. The results of these analyses are reported in the following section.

Table 1. Age of regular and exchange students

| | Regular students | | | Exchange students | | | t-Test | | |
|-------------|------------------|----------|-----------|-------------------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| | <i>n</i> | <i>m</i> | <i>sd</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>m</i> | <i>sd</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> |
| Age (years) | 135 | 22.81 | 3.31 | 128 | 22.00 | 2.19 | -2.37 | 234 | 0.019 |

Table 2. Socio-economic background of regular and exchange students: Academic background and native language of the parents.

| | Regular students | | | Exchange students | | | χ^2 -Test | | |
|--|------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|----------------|-----------|----------|
| | <i>n</i> | <i>f_{abs}</i> | <i>f_{rel}</i> (%) | <i>n</i> | <i>f_{abs}</i> | <i>f_{rel}</i> (%) | χ^2 | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> |
| At least one parent with academic background | 135 | 47 | 34.8 | 128 | 70 | 54.7 | 10.507 | 1 | 0.001 |
| Native language different from language used at university | 135 | 12 | 8.9 | 128 | 24 | 18.8 | 5.408 | 1 | 0.020 |

RESULTS

The results presented in this chapter outline the demographics (i.e. personal background and socio-economic background) of the exchange students (= experimental group) and the regular students (= control group) in teacher education, followed by the description of personal traits, attitudes and experiences of both groups. As we examine exchange stays in the specific field of teacher education, the third part focuses on teaching-specific competencies of the regular and exchange students. The presentation of the motives of the exchange students to study abroad completes the results section.

Demographics of exchange students in Teacher Education

In view of the *personal background*, the exchange students do not significantly differ from the regular students in regard to gender or nationality: 86.7% students of the exchange students and 83.7% of the regular students are female ($\chi^2 = 0.473$; *df* = 1, *p* = 0.492). These figures illustrate the current trend that teacher education is especially preferred by female students. In 2009, 84.1% of the students in primary, pre-school and lower secondary education in Switzerland were female (Bundesamt für Statistik, 2011). With regard to nationality, the Swiss are the dominant group and amount to 89.1% of the exchange students and to 88.1% of the regular students ($\chi^2 = 2.375$; *df* = 2; *p* = 0.305). However, there is a significant difference regarding the

age: With an average age of 22, the exchange students are significantly younger than the regular students (see Table 1).

The *socio-economic background* of the students has been assessed by two traditionally used criteria, i.e. the educational level of the parents and, as a proxy, the number of books at home. As an expression of the student's cultural background, their native language was chosen as an additional item. The data analyses show significant differences between exchange and regular students regarding all three criteria.

Students with parents with higher levels of education are significantly more likely to participate in an exchange program (see Table 2): 54.7% (*n* = 70) of the exchange students have at least one parent with an academic background while the percentages decrease to 34.8% (*n* = 47) for regular students. In view of the cultural background, students with a native language different from the university language are significantly overrepresented in the group of exchange students (see Table 2): 18.8% (*n* = 24) of the exchange students and 8.9% (*n* = 12) of the regular students do not speak at home the teaching language of the university.

Regarding the availability of books at home, the exchange students are significantly better equipped than regular students. The average number of exchange student's books at home amounts to 175, compared to 95 books for the regular students.

Personality traits, attitudes and prior experiences

In view of personality traits, the data of the scale

Table 3. Personality traits and attitudes of regular and exchange students

| | Regular students | | | Exchange students | | | t-Test | | |
|---|------------------|----------|-----------|-------------------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| | <i>n</i> | <i>m</i> | <i>sd</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>m</i> | <i>sd</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> |
| Openness ^{a)} | 133 | 2.99 | 0.60 | 125 | 3.00 | 0.72 | 0.17 | 242 | 0.868 |
| Importance to get to know the culture of the locals during holidays ^{b)} | 135 | 4.04 | 0.90 | 128 | 4.32 | 0.78 | 2.65 | 261 | 0.008 |
| Commitment to social justice ^{a)} | 125 | 2.35 | 0.94 | 125 | 2.22 | 0.93 | -1.08 | 248 | 0.280 |

Notes: ^{a)} Answer format from 1 = "not true" to 4 = "true".

^{b)} Answer format from 1 = "not important" to 5 = "very important"

Table 4. Frequency of prior intercultural experiences of regular and exchange students

| | Regular students | | | Exchange students | | | χ^2 -Test | | |
|--|------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|----------------|-----------|----------|
| | <i>N</i> | <i>f_{abs}</i> | <i>f_{rel}</i> (%) | <i>N</i> | <i>f_{abs}</i> | <i>f_{rel}</i> (%) | χ^2 | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> |
| Frequency of students having been abroad longer than one year | 135 | 19 | 14.1 | 128 | 25 | 19.5 | 1.405 | 1 | 0.236 |
| Frequency of students never having been abroad longer than one month after the age of 15 | 135 | 13 | 9.6 | 128 | 19 | 14.8 | 1.671 | 1 | 0.196 |
| Frequency of students having intercultural contacts at home less than once per year | 135 | 20 | 14.8 | 128 | 24 | 18.8 | 0.730 | 1 | 0.393 |
| Frequency of students having intercultural contacts at home more than once per month. | 135 | 30 | 22.2 | 128 | 31 | 24.2 | 0.147 | 1 | 0.701 |

'openness' do not show any significant differences (see Table 3). The analysis of attitudes towards social and intercultural issues points out a significant difference between exchange and regular students in the field of interest towards foreign cultures during holidays (see Table 3): 49.2% (*n* = 63) of the exchange students and 37.8% (*n* = 51) of the regular students declare that they find it important to get to know the local culture and local people during their holidays. There is no significant difference, however, between the two groups regarding their commitment to social justice (see Table 3).

In view of prior intercultural experiences, the current data do not show any significant differences between the regular and the exchange students, neither in terms of frequency nor in terms of intensity of prior intercultural contacts. For example, 19.5% (*n* = 25) of the exchange students and 14.1% (*n* = 19) of the regular students had already spent one year or longer abroad once or several

times in their life. Frequent prior intercultural contacts is reported by 7% (*n* = 9) of the exchange students and 8.1% (*n* = 11) of the regular students (see Table 4). In contrast to these intercultural experiences, 14.8% (*n* = 19) of the exchange students and 9.6% (*n* = 13) of the regular students report that they have never been abroad for longer than one month. And 18.8% (*n* = 24) of the exchange students and 14.8% (*n* = 20) of the regular students report having had contact with people from a different cultural background less than once a year (see Table 4).

In view of the intensity of intercultural contacts abroad and at home, again, the data do not show any significant differences between the two groups (see Table 5). Both, exchange and regular students report having rather intensive contacts with local people and less intensive contacts to foreigners and fellow compatriots when being abroad.

Table 5. Intensity of prior intercultural experiences of regular and exchange students

| | Regular students | | | Exchange students | | | t-Test | | |
|---|------------------|----------|-----------|-------------------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| | <i>n</i> | <i>m</i> | <i>sd</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>m</i> | <i>sd</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> |
| Intensity of social contacts abroad ^{a)} | 109 | 3.64 | 0.74 | 104 | 3.63 | 0.70 | -0.14 | 211 | 0.887 |
| Intensity of social contacts to local people abroad ^{a)} | 108 | 4.23 | 1.00 | 105 | 4.05 | 1.00 | -1.34 | 211 | 0.182 |
| Intensity of social contacts to foreigners abroad ^{a)} | 108 | 3.78 | 1.24 | 104 | 3.77 | 1.21 | -0.05 | 210 | 0.960 |
| Intensity of contacts to fellow countrymen abroad ^{a)} | 109 | 3.10 | 1.47 | 103 | 2.96 | 1.36 | -0.72 | 210 | 0.472 |
| Intensity of intercultural contacts at home ^{a)} | 123 | 2.41 | 0.93 | 117 | 2.43 | 0.92 | 0.11 | 238 | 0.915 |

Note: ^{a)} Answer format from 1 = “not intensive at all” to 5 = “very intensive.”

Table 6. Teaching-specific competencies of regular and exchange students

| | Regular students | | | Exchange students | | | t-Test | | |
|--|------------------|----------|-----------|-------------------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| | <i>n</i> | <i>m</i> | <i>sd</i> | <i>n</i> | <i>m</i> | <i>sd</i> | <i>t</i> | <i>df</i> | <i>p</i> |
| Appreciation of cultural diversity in school (scale) ^{a)} | 132 | 1.86 | 0.51 | 128 | 1.78 | 0.56 | -1.26 | 258 | 0.207 |
| Self-efficacy beliefs for dealing with cultural diversity in schools (scale) ^{a)} | 132 | 3.25 | 0.41 | 126 | 3.30 | 0.43 | 0.92 | 256 | 0.357 |
| Motivation to teach (scale) ^{a)} | 132 | 3.61 | 0.36 | 126 | 3.48 | 0.42 | -2.77 | 246 | 0.006 |
| Flexibility in teaching (scale) ^{a)} | 131 | 2.95 | 0.41 | 127 | 3.10 | 0.51 | 2.61 | 241 | 0.010 |
| Professional self-efficacy beliefs (scale) ^{a)} | 132 | 3.47 | 0.33 | 127 | 3.48 | 0.34 | 0.94 | 257 | 0.812 |

Note: ^{a)} Answer format from 1 = “not true” to 4 = “true”.

Teaching-specific competencies

In view of teaching-specific facets of intercultural competence, the data does not show any significant differences between exchange and regular students neither regarding the appreciation of cultural diversity in school nor regarding the self-efficacy for dealing with cultural diversity in schools (see Table 6). In both groups, the data indicates a rather low appreciation of cultural diversity in school, whereas the self-efficacy for dealing with cultural diversity in school is rather well developed. In contrast, significant differences between regular and exchange students are found in the field of teaching motivation and teaching flexibility: While the regular

students are significantly more motivated to teach (see Table 6), the data shows a significantly higher teaching flexibility in the group of exchange students. Exchange students therefore seem to be more flexible to adapt their prepared teaching arrangements to the current situation when needed. Regarding professional self-efficacy, the data does not show any significant difference between the two groups (see Table 6).

Motives to participate in exchange programs

The exchange students report a broad variety of motives to study abroad. The current data shows that personal,

Table 7. Motives to study abroad in descending order of the mean value

| <i>Item</i> | Exchange students | | |
|---|--------------------------|----------|-----------|
| | <i>n</i> | <i>m</i> | <i>sd</i> |
| 1 ...because I want to broaden my personal horizon ^{a)} | 128 | 3.83 | 0.38 |
| 2 ...because I want to practise and improve languages ^{a)} | 125 | 3.70 | 0.67 |
| 3 ...because I am interested in people from other cultures ^{a)} | 124 | 3.50 | 0.78 |
| 4 ...because I want to make experiences useful for my future profession ^{a)} | 128 | 3.43 | 0.73 |
| 5 ...because I want to invest in my personal education ^{a)} | 125 | 3.33 | 0.91 |
| 6 ...because I want to get to know a foreign country ^{a)} | 125 | 3.20 | 1.14 |
| 7 ...because I want to improve my professional prospects ^{a)} | 127 | 2.92 | 0.97 |
| 8 ...because I want to experience something new ^{a)} | 125 | 2.86 | 1.06 |
| 9 ...because I want to become more autonomous and independent ^{a)} | 125 | 2.65 | 1.09 |
| 10 ...because I want to leave home ^{a)} | 128 | 2.54 | 1.09 |
| 11 ...because I am fed up with my home university ^{a)} | 125 | 2.40 | 1.11 |
| 12 ...because I know somebody in that specific country ^{a)} | 127 | 1.28 | 0.73 |

Note: ^{a)} Answer format from 1 = “not true” to 4 = “true”.

professional and cultural considerations are relevant motives to study abroad (see Table 7).

The findings in Table 7 show that an amalgam of personal, cultural and professional motives influence the decision to participate in an exchange stay.

Even though the motive to practice and improve languages may imply a professional value, the most important motives seem to have rather a personal or cultural character and the data suggests that the exchange stays in teacher education are not mainly driven by professional motives. However, some professional motives such as the opportunity ‘to make useful experiences for the future profession’ or ‘to improve the professional prospects’ are valued to be more important than the mere personal motives such as ‘to experience something new’ or ‘to become more autonomous and independent’.

All in all, the data shows that exchange students are motivated to study abroad in order to develop their cultural, professional and personal competencies rather than dissatisfaction at their home university or at home.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present contribution examined the characteristics and motives of exchange students in teacher education. It aimed at identifying to what extent the generally known characteristics of exchange students are also valid for teacher education. Furthermore, it aimed at identifying personality traits, attitudes and prior experiences as well as teaching-specific competencies that characterize

exchange students. And, finally, it searched for the driving motives of teacher education students to do an exchange stay.

Regarding the *generally known characteristics of exchange students*, the present study examined the role of gender, age and socio-economic background. Regarding the role of *gender* in exchange programs, the present study does not support the findings in the existing literature (e.g. Goldstein and Kim, 2006; Di Pietro and Page, 2008; Salisbury et al., 2009) that show a clearly higher participation rate for female students than for their male counterparts. The present sample shows, indeed, a clearly higher percentage of female exchange students. However, this corresponds to the clearly higher percentage of female students at the universities of teacher education in Switzerland in general. Therefore, the present study supports the argument of Heublein *et al.* (2008) that the gender bias in study abroad programs may be due to imbalances in gender distribution in different majors.

In terms of the *age* of the exchange students, our findings disagree with the existing literature that suggests that exchange students tend to be older than regular students (Di Pietro and Page, 2008; with considerable differences between countries, see Souto Otero and McCoshan, 2006). At the Swiss universities of teacher education, exchange students are significantly younger than regular students, even though the difference is less than one year. A possible reason for this opposed age allocation might be the especially high percentage of students in teacher education who study teacher education as a second career (Lehmann et al., 2007).

These older students might have more social and financial responsibilities and are therefore less flexible to study abroad than the younger students who do not have these obligations.

The analyses of the *socio-economic background* in this study correspond to the findings of the current literature suggesting that exchange students derive from a more privileged socio-economic background than regular students (European Commission, 2000; Di Pietro and Page, 2008; Souto Otero, 2008). The current data shows, likewise, an overrepresentation of students with academic parents among the exchange students. In addition, the data show an overrepresentation of students with a foreign native language among the participants. Not having the university language as a native language is an indicator of being a member of a minority group, this finding is not in line with the current literature suggesting that minority students are underrepresented among study abroad participants (Thomas and McMahon, 1998; Salisbury et al., 2009). A possible reason for this discrepancy might be the use of different indicators for minority groups: In the literature, minorities are mainly covered by considering race or ethnicity; the present study, in contrast, considered minority groups in terms of their native language. The overrepresentation of language minorities in this study might be explained by the fact that Switzerland itself is a multilingual country and quite a lot of children are brought up bilingual without being a member of an ethnic minority (BfS, 2010). These bilingual students are more used to expressing themselves in two languages and to orient themselves in two different cultural environments. Such experiences from early childhood possibly influence the motivation of young adults to study abroad.

Regarding the identification of *personality traits, attitudes and prior experiences* of exchange students, the literature review shows that expectations and facets of intercultural competence play 'a far more critical role in determining who studied abroad than academic or career factors' (Goldstein and Kim, 2006, p. 517). The findings of the present study support this conclusion only in part: On the one hand, the present data suggests that participants in exchange programs attribute themselves to be interested in local cultures during holidays' significantly more often than regular students. On the other hand, the data does not show any significant difference between exchange and regular students neither regarding their openness nor regarding frequency or intensity of prior intercultural experiences at home or abroad. These results suggest that the proposition of Goldstein and Kim cannot be supported when using measures of frequency and intensity of prior intercultural experiences.

The same applies when referring to *teaching-specific competencies*: Exchange students do not show a stronger appreciation of cultural diversity or a higher degree of self-efficacy for dealing with cultural diversity in schools than regular students do. These facets of intercultural competence, therefore, do not seem to play a crucial role in determining who studies abroad. Against this background, these considered personality traits, attitudes, prior experiences and teaching-specific competencies do not characterize appropriately the exchange students in teacher education. However, the higher interest in local cultures during holiday as reported above, suggests that the interests between exchange and regular students do differ in fact. Significant differences are not only found in terms of interest but also regarding the motivation to teach and the flexibility in teaching.

These findings suggest that the frequently presumed 'Matthew Effect' - fostering and rewarding those who are already advantaged (see for the educational field e.g. Stanovich, 1986) - does not apply to intercultural learning in exchange stays: The present data does not give any evidence that students with already very developed facets of intercultural competence participate in exchange stays in order to develop their intercultural affinity even more.

Regarding the *driving motives* for an exchange stay in teacher education, the present study supports the existing literature (Di Pietro and Page, 2008; Heublein et al., 2008): Also in teacher education, the motives of exchange students are made up of a conglomerate of diverse aspects: Learning and improving languages, developing personally, having social and cultural experiences and developing professionally. Insofar, the motives of teacher education students to participate in an exchange stay do not differ substantially from the motives of students in other study programs. It may be concluded, therefore, that the very locally oriented job market in the teaching profession does not seem to reframe the motive structure regarding an exchange stay.

To conclude, the results of the present study give evidence that exchange students in teacher education should be considered as a specific type of exchange students in Higher Education: Whereas the existing literature depicts an appropriate picture of exchange students in teacher education regarding gender, socio-economic background and motive structure, it does not correspond in terms of age, affiliation to minority groups and facets of intercultural competence. Considering these latter dimensions, exchange students in teacher education differ from exchange students from other study programs. The prototype of an exchange student in teacher education is a young, bilingual woman with a rich

socio-economic background. In teacher education, and this is again in line with the evidence of other study programs, exchange students are a fairly specific group.

The practical implication of this conclusion refers to the access to exchange programs. Following the assumption that exchange programs in teacher education should in fact be open to all types of teacher education students and that intercultural experiences (as provided in an exchange stay) are important opportunities to learn for future teachers (who will have to work in a multicultural professional field, i.e. in multicultural schools), the following question arises: How can older, monolingual men with poorer socio-economic backgrounds be attracted to exchange programs? Answers might be sought considering economic approaches (e.g. scholarships) and approaches focusing on sensitizing the benefits and values of exchange programs (e.g. specific information campaigns or discussions with former exchange students).

The implication of further research refers to the scope of the present study. Possible limitations of this study can be discussed on three levels. *Firstly*, the present data derives from Swiss teacher education institutions; in some specific dimensions of exchange students, the literature shows considerable differences between countries (e.g. Souto Otero and McCoshan, 2006). Against this background, we do not know to what extent the specificities of teacher education exchange students as suggested by the present study apply to teacher education exchange students in other countries. The present findings, therefore, require a validation in other contexts.

Secondly, some methodological constraints have to be considered. On the one hand, the internal consistency of some scales may not be very persuasive, but it is acceptable. The results regarding the reduced scale 'openness' (with a Cronbachs' α of .60) and regarding the scale 'motivation to teach' (Cronbachs' α of .68) have to be read with respective reservation. On the other hand, the present paper compares exchange students with regular students on different dimensions. The significant differences regarding age and socio-economic background might confound some of the other differences. The design of the present study does not allow for a clarification of these interrelations.

Thirdly, the claim for the relevance of facets of intercultural competence in determining who participates in exchange stays (Goldstein and Kim, 2006) can neither be maintained when using measures of frequency and intensity of prior intercultural experiences nor when using 'appreciation of cultural diversity' and 'self-efficacy when dealing with cultural diversity' as indicators for specific facets of intercultural competence. However, the differences in the self-reported interest in local cultures

during holidays suggest the assumption that a kind of affinity to intercultural issues does, in fact, play a certain role in determining who participates in exchange stays. These findings may give an insight into the role of different facets of intercultural competence for exchange stays, but they may not explain the interplay of these different facets. The role of these – and further – facets of intercultural competence and their interplay is not explored sufficiently and requires, therefore, a specific attention in further research.

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