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## CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS



*Sharing the Passion for Learning*

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# CULTURAL SENSITIVITY AND LINGUISTIC IDENTITY: CHALLENGES OF ACADEMIC MOBILITY

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## Abstract

In a global and permanently dynamic contemporary society, young people, and the student generation in particular, assume a growing responsibility for the development of a promising future, but in awareness of all social, cultural, artistic and linguistic differences, and with a necessary and definitive attitude of tolerance and inclusion. As promoters and motivators of a learning experience, the academic mobility programmes are proposed as mobilizers and builders of a European socio-cultural and civic consciousness, in a space where the various domains (social, cultural, institutional and linguistic) are the target of multidimensional processes. In order to consolidate this desired process, communication (overcoming the language barriers that may exist) and integration (accepting different socio-cultural values) in the host institutional community, are assumed as a sign of respect and individual and collective identity construction. In this context, the following question/problem emerged: What challenges do mobile students experience in their relationship with language and culture in their host Higher Education Institution?

In order to find an answer, the following objectives were outlined:

- i) to understand and analyse the process of integration of mobile students in terms of their knowledge of the local language and culture;
- ii) to verify the progress of their language and communication skills in the interaction(s) developed with the educational community;
- iii) to perceive the development of their (inter)cultural skills and the recognition of an exchange dialogue with the wider community; and,
- iv) to analyse their experiences and how they are reflected in their academic and personal training.

This study was addressed to academic programme students at a Portuguese Higher Education Institution (HEI) (random sample), enrolled in different courses and curricular units, in the first semester of the 2022-2023 academic year. As an instrument for data collection, we used an open-ended questionnaire survey created in the Google Forms platform, which was distributed online by email, explaining the purpose of the study.

The students reported that they experienced some linguistic difficulties, because although the HEI offered intensive learning courses for foreign students, they considered that learning a language to communicate with some fluency requires time. This feeling is completely diluted when it comes to knowledge of the local culture, as they have a lot of information made available to them by the student associations and by the foreign relations office, a fact which, they say, also contributes, albeit informally, to the development of language and communication skills, and to contact with the community in general. This excellent welcome is reflected in a very, very positive way in the academic and personal formation, because the fact of being well, predisposes to learning and to integration in the local culture. For us, this HEI is an excellent reference in all areas, but especially in the academic and personal ones.

Keywords: Student mobility, cultural sensitivity, language learning, exchange dialogue.