EINFOSE Project: Stimulating Diversity of Students and Teachers' Engagement in the European Higher Education Area

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ABSTRACT
The poster aims to present the findings of the study related to the EU research project EINFOSE - European Information Science Education: Encouraging Mobility and Learning Outcomes Harmonization. The project’s main goal is to investigate how to remove barriers to the students' enrolment in LIS/IS graduate programs across Europe and at the same time introduce diverse social, cultural and technological experience. The first phase of the longitudinal study conducted in June 2017 explored the motivation and expectations of students enrolling in the EINFOSE European Summer School in Information Sciences (ESSIS). In the final report the results will attempt to align the expectations of students from different areas with the ESSIS program and thus contribute to the main EINFOSE project goal.

Keywords  EINFOSE project, EU Higher Education, internationalization, harmonization, diversity, mobility.

INTRODUCTION
The topics of harmonization, mobility, internationalization and modernization of Library and Information Science (LIS)/Information Science (IS) education have been discussed around the globe for over twenty years. Several attempts have been made, in this effort, to strengthen the cooperation between North America and Europe (cf Abdullahi, and Kajberg, 2004; Abdullahi, Kajberg, and Virkus, 2007). In Europe, the European Association for Library and Information Education and Research (EUCLID) has been very active in promoting internationalization and joint curriculum development by organizing several events (seminars, conferences) in Italy, Greece and Germany at the beginning of 2000s. Eventually, the joint efforts of EUCLID and Royal School of LIS (RSLIS), Denmark, resulted in an EU funded project (2004-2005) culminating in the final conference on LIS curriculum development, held in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 2005 (cf Kajberg and Lörring, 2005; Kajberg, 2007). Initiatives from both sides of the Atlantic ocean resulted in various activities dedicated to the Higher Education (HE) in LIS/IS field. For example, European Union has launched initiatives such as Rethinking Education, European Higher Education in the World and Opening up HE (cf Johnson, 2013; Virkus, 2015), while in the US, the conference on the future of information profession was organized at Chapel Hill in 2012 (Marchionini and Moran, 2012). In the European context such efforts imply that modernization of HE should contribute to the Europe 2020 goals by boosting EU competitiveness and growth through better skilled workforce, more employment, growth of students and teachers mobility and more active role of HE in the society (cf European Commission, 2013; Aparac-Jelušić, 2016).

The EINFOSE is the first EU project on LIS/IS university education in European Higher Institutions (EHI) to be funded after the joint EUCLID and RSLIS project on curriculum development in 2005. In this project, funded under Erasmus+ Key Action 2 - Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education for the period 2016-2018, partnering institutions1 from eight European countries have been working together to develop educational guidelines and recommendations for LIS/IS education. One of the project's goals is to investigate ways and means of lowering barriers to the students' enrolment at graduate programs in LIS/IS and introducing various social, cultural and technological experience in IS education across Europe. In order to investigate how different entry requirements observed in partnering institutions could be harmonized and students

1 The partnering institutions come from the following European university departments in the field of IS: Barcelona, Spain; Börs, Sweden; Graz, Austria; Hildesheim, Germany; Ljubljana, Slovenia; Pisa, Italy; and Ankara, Turkey.
with different educational backgrounds allowed to enroll at the graduate programs in LIS/IS, the project aims to produce five main intellectual outputs (IO): online teaching and communication platform; online educational resources (OER) to be used during and after European Summer Schools in IS (ESSIS), evaluation and didactic frameworks, and policy recommendations. Teachers and students from all partnering universities/countries will participate in ESSIS. During the summer school (to be held in August 2017 in Germany) students will listen to four courses. A one month online pre-assignments and two months of online communication following the ESSIS are obligatory for all participating students.

STUDY

In the poster authors will present only a portion of results obtained in the first phase (conducted in 2017) of the longitudinal study (which will be conducted prior to and after ESSIS in 2017 and 2018) focusing on the students participating in the summer school.

Research questions (RQ):

What is the background of students attending ESSIS 2017? What is their motivation to participate in ESSIS 2017? What are their expectations from ESSIS 2017? How are they satisfied with ESSIS 2017?

METHODOLOGY

The 2017 study will be conducted in two parts, with the help of qualitative methods. First, in the period June 1-14, 2017 students, who have applied to participate in ESSIS (N=20), were asked to fill out the online questionnaire via EINFOSE platform. The survey consisted of 13 questions (11 open-ended and two closed). The first group of questions, referring to the RQ1 focused on the students’ background (age, gender, education, mobility experience etc.). The second group of questions investigated students’ motivation to enroll into EINFOSE Summer school program (RQ2) and the third group of questions looked into their expectations from ESSIS (RQ3). So far, this data has been analyzed and will be presented in this proposal. In September 2017, following the closure of ESSIS, onsite and Skype interviews with students will be conducted to find out about their satisfaction with ESSIS (RQ4). These interviews will be recorded and presented as video clips complementing the poster.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Out of total of 20 students participating in ESSIS, only 15 responded. Although it was initially planned to attract only students from outside LIS/IS fields, seven respondents come from the undergraduate LIS/IS study, and only eight students have undergraduate education other than LIS/IS (e.g. civil engineering, administration, language study and digital humanities). Interestingly, four hold a BA in management-related studies. Also, it was interesting to see that only five respondents have spent some time abroad during their BA studies. However, at the same time the large majority of students (N=12) would like to study outside their home countries. Also, it was interesting to find out that most respondents (7 out of 8) who have undergraduate education other than LIS/IS, have already been introduced to the field of LIS/IS in some way (read some literature, took some elective courses etc.).

When asked about their motivation to participate in ESSIS, majority of students (N=13) described that they plan to enroll into the LIS/IS graduate program of study. Four respondents also listed social and cultural benefits of participating in such an event. When asked about topics/problems within the field of information sciences in which they are particularly interested they evenly listed computer-related (AI, data mining, information retrieval, digital library) and LIS topics (library, information and knowledge management, information organization, reference services, bibliometrics). When asked about their expectations from the participation in ESSIS, the respondents listed both benefits of sharing the educational experience with international students (N=4) and getting better insight into and knowledge about LIS/IS field (N=12). Finally, all respondents agreed that participation at ESSIS will facilitate their graduate study in LIS/IS, if they choose to follow that educational path.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The study has responded to all research questions. Overall, it is expected that the results will be very useful for academics teaching at ESSIS because they will provide them with the background information about the students and their motivation for and expectations of ESSIS. Thus, the content of the courses can be selected and adapted in advance. The results of the second phase of the (qualitative) study (interviews regarding their satisfaction with the summer school), which will be conducted in September 2017, will surely provide additional valuable information which will help the evaluation of the program and indicate possible areas of improvement. All this will be used in redesigning the summer school program which will have positive impact on the students’ understanding of LIS/IS area and which will adequately introduce them to basic concepts and problems in LIS/IS.

REFERENCES


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