

Trends in the International Academic Migration: A Case of Spain

Antonio Mihi-Ramírez

ABSTRACT

Objective: The objective of this paper is to analyse how undergraduate students' mobility has changed after the last economics recession.

Research Design & Methods: The study takes into account the latest data with respect to public and private Universities that are subject of Spanish higher education system, comparing it at international level in order to find the problems and challenges of recent post-recession years.

Findings: The results showed significant imbalances in mobile students' trends by home and host region, especially after a deep restructuring of the Spanish higher education system in response to the last crisis. In particular there are substantial differences in tuition fees, scholarships, number of teachers and their skills according to the region and type of university. Consequently, international inflows and international study programs and agreements became very important for academics institutions, students and scholars.

Implications & Recommendations: Given the growing number of students who study abroad, after the economic collapse of 2008, there is an opportunity among higher income host countries for enhanced recruitment opportunities of highly skilled workers. Therefore, adaptation of the academic offer to the language, needs and diversity of mobile students, can further increase their number. Also, increasing the number of highly skilled teachers can further attract mobile students, while improving the quality of higher education system.

Contribution & Value Added: This research provides valuable information to understand current problems, challenges, changes and opportunities concerning higher education mobility, as shown in the analysis of the case of Spain and through international comparisons.

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporarily higher youth unemployment affects students' expectations and makes the competition in the labour market fierce (Li & Lowe, 2016). It has become vital to take advantage of the boundaries of international mobility in order to improve students' skills enhancing their future labour opportunities (Heid & Larch, 2012; Balasooriya et al.).

Moreover, a substantial number of transformations and important facts take place in universities. These include the education systems' convergence under the European space of Higher Education and those changes in the economic conditions that anticipate severe complications and restrictions under the economic downturn that can occur in the future.

Hence there is a growing number of universities' initiatives, agencies, scientific and academic institutes to support the international students' mobility (Gao, 2014). It is important to understand how the current situation affects the international mobility in the higher education system. Therefore this research focuses on the analysis of international mobility in the higher education with the purpose to serve as the basis for further reflections, international comparisons and studies.

In particular, the study of mobile undergraduate students in Spain makes it easier to understand new challenges and problems of student' inflows after the economics collapse, especially in the case of Spain. Thus, this article examines recent data with respect to public and private universities of Spain and makes comparisons at an international level. It includes: mobile students' trends by home and host region in the recent years; a detailed information about the Spanish higher education system and its restructuration after the crisis; international inflows' features and international programmes; and an analysis of specific problems due to the crisis such as the important changes in tuition fees, scholarships, teachers' skills and their reductions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Students' International Mobility

International education is an investment that permits to obtain future potential earnings and better labour opportunities, especially in the case of higher education (Thurow, 1970; Becker, 1971; Mixon, 1992).

The trends of students' migration reflect improving students' benefits showing that they have increased in the last years (Blachford & Zhang, 2014; Gao, 2014). The data presented in the table 1 illustrates that students' mobility constitutes a world-wide phenomenon.

In the case of Europe, there is a growing number of inbound mobile students. According to OECD (2014) the number of mobile students increased from 980 883 in 2000 to 2 160 874 in 2012. These days Europe has become main destination for tertiary mobile students hosting 48% of their total number, followed by North America, with 21% and Asia with 18% respectively (OECD, 2014). However, there are many differences among regions and countries because of their socio-economic conditions which have substantially changed, especially due to the alteration of economic factors after the crisis of 2008. Thus, taking into account the average number of inbound mobile students by

region (see table 1) we can observe that there is a considerable difference between Western Europe and North America (almost 6%) and Central and Eastern Europe (2.01).

Table 1. The students' mobility rate by world regions in 2012

Regional Averages	Inbound mobile students rate (%)	Outbound mobile students rate (%)
World	2.04	1.8
Arab States	2.89	3.5
Central and Eastern Europe	2.01	2.0
Central Asia	1.95	7.5
East Asia and the Pacific	1.34	2.0
Latin America and the Caribbean	1.80	0.9
North America and Western Europe	5.86	1.6
South and West Asia	0.10	1.0
Sub-Saharan Africa	3.00	4.5

Source: UNESCO (2014).

These imbalances can be explained in terms of economic and non-economic reasons (OECD, 2014; Mihi-Ramírez & Kumpikaitė, 2013). Whereas the earlier are the expectations of better future salaries and job opportunities; tuition fees; specific policies encouraging and supporting students' mobility; a reduction of transportation costs and the internationalization of labour markets for highly skilled people.

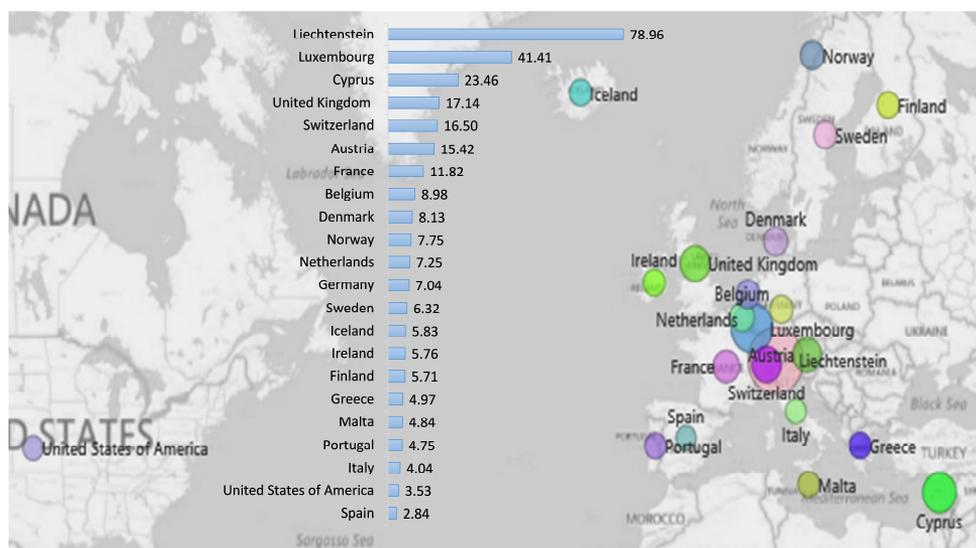


Figure 1. The Inbound mobility rate (%) in North America and Western Europe in 2012

Source: OECD (2014).

The latter can be attributed to the perceived value of studying abroad; the academic offer; culture and languages similarities; government efforts to support students in targeted specific areas that are growing rapidly in origin countries; immigration policies;

a significant increase in global access to tertiary education; and particular countries marketing efforts to attract students from outside.



Figure 2. The Inbound mobility rate (%) in Central and Eastern Europe in 2012

Source: OECD (2014).

Figures 1 and 2 show the inbound mobile students (by host country) in the regions of Western Europe, North America and Central and Eastern Europe.

European Union (EU) has the major proportion (39%) of foreign students (OECD, 2014) in the world, with 74% of mobile students that come from other European countries, subject of EU integration policies. Countries with higher GDP per capita are generally perceived as good destinations where salaries and labor options are higher (Mihi-Ramírez and Kumpikaitė, 2013), especially when labor market opportunities are limited in home countries.

Regarding tuition fees they depend on national policies, however the most recent economic conditions yet add to their increase and in the same time the number of scholarships and grants has decreased, since education budgets have been reduced considerably. Yet, there are different education policies in each country, and some of them even have increased education budgets (OECD, 2014).

Among non-economic reasons, mobile students enroll in diverse programmes and their decisions are influenced by the lack of appropriate studies in their native countries (OECD, 2014). Furthermore, mobile students intend to study abroad in order to improve their English skills, therefore those destinations where the English language prevalence attracts considerably higher number of mobile students, with exceptions such as Japan and countries where the language of instruction is widely spoken i.e. French, German, Russian and Spanish.

The number of international students depend on country' internationalization strategy. Thus countries that use marketing campaigns to attract students have increased their number of mobile students. Countries that have a more local and university-driven approach, like the United States, have decreased their number mobile students.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Students International Mobility. The Case of Spain

To better understand how differences between countries affect students' migration, this study addresses the changes in the students' mobility toward the Spanish higher education system in the last years. Spain has a well-structured education system which is established in 82 Universities distributed among 19 regions (Figure 3)¹, with the average number of 19000 college students corresponding to one University (Ministry of Education of Spain, 2014).

Spain is subjected to a severe restrictions due to the crisis while it is simultaneously adapting itself to the European space of higher education.

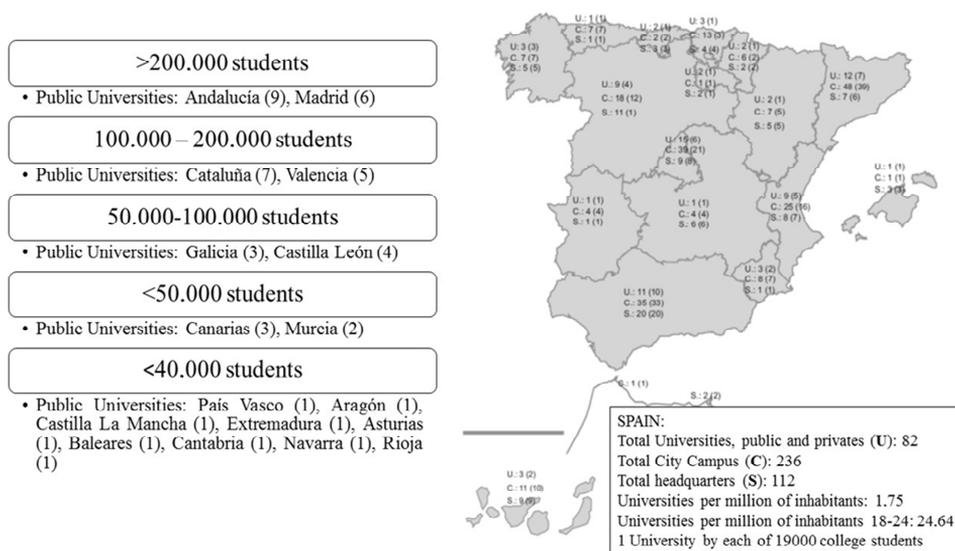


Figure 3. The Universities in Spain in 2014

Source: Ministry of Education of Spain (2014).

Better Opportunities, More Competition, More Mobile Students

An increased student migration flow to Spain started yet in the 1980s and to a certain extent it can be linked to the cooperation with some countries of Latin-America and Europe (Rey & Cebrán, 2010). Since then it has been progressively expanding and growing. Figure 4 and 5 presents the origins of students who have travelled to Spain from 2011 to 2014

In general, in spite of the current economic crisis, the number of students from abroad has increased in the last years (Balasooriya et al., 2014; Li & Lowe, 2016). On one

¹Regions of Spain: Andalucía, Aragón, Asturias, Baleares, Canarias, Cantabria, Castilla - La Mancha, Castilla y León, Cataluña, Comunidad Valenciana, Extremadura, Galicia, Madrid, Murcia, Navarra, País Vasco, Rioja, Ceuta and Melilla.

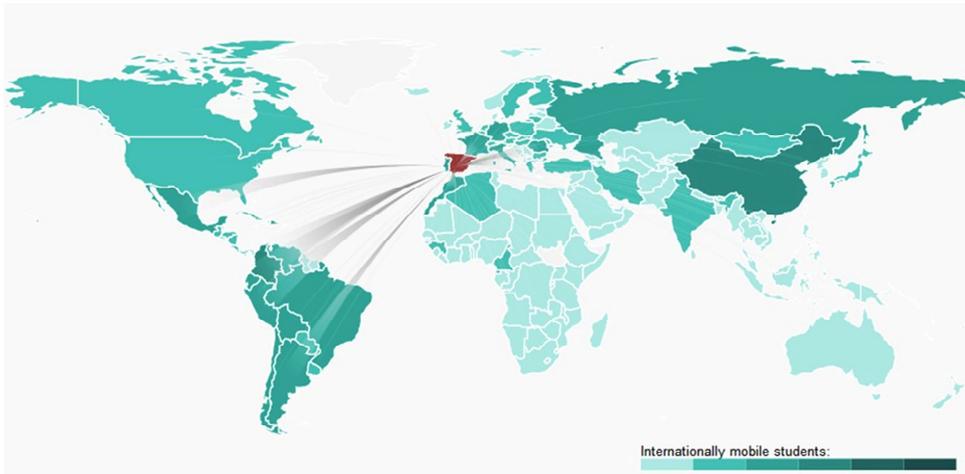


Figure 4. Students’ migration to Spain in 2014
Source: UNESCO (2014).

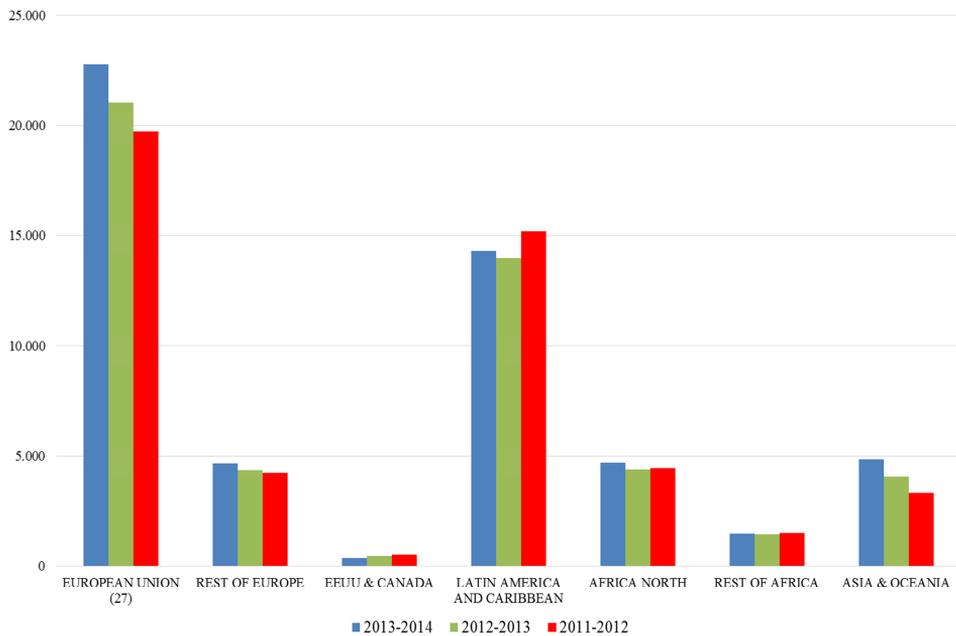


Figure 5. Mobile students in Spain by home regions in the last recent years
Source: Adapted from the Ministry of Education of Spain (2014).

hand, intensive labour competition forces migration (the inflow) of more skilled workers, and international education leads toward a better differentiation of potential job’s candidates (Blachford & Zhang, 2014). Moreover, it can imply better positions and higher wages in the future (Becker, 1971). In this regard, the annual world report about salaries

published by the International Institute for Labour Studies (IILS) has showed that the labour income share for low skilled workers fell by 12 percentage points between the early 1980s and 2005, whereas for highly skilled workers it increased by 7 percent (IILS, 2011, p. 43). Moreover, a similar tendency was reflected in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2012 annual report showing labour conditions in 13 countries analyzed.

On the other hand, as we can observe in figure 6, a higher education level is linked to a lower unemployment level. For instance, in the case of Spain, which is undergoing a severe recession with one of the highest unemployment of European Union, the unemployment rate of workers with advanced education was always been the lowest, even during the last years. Therefore, the opportunity of improve the level of students' education can be considered as a push factor that forces students to make decisions about continuation of their studies in other countries (Čiarnienė & Kumpikaitė, 2011).

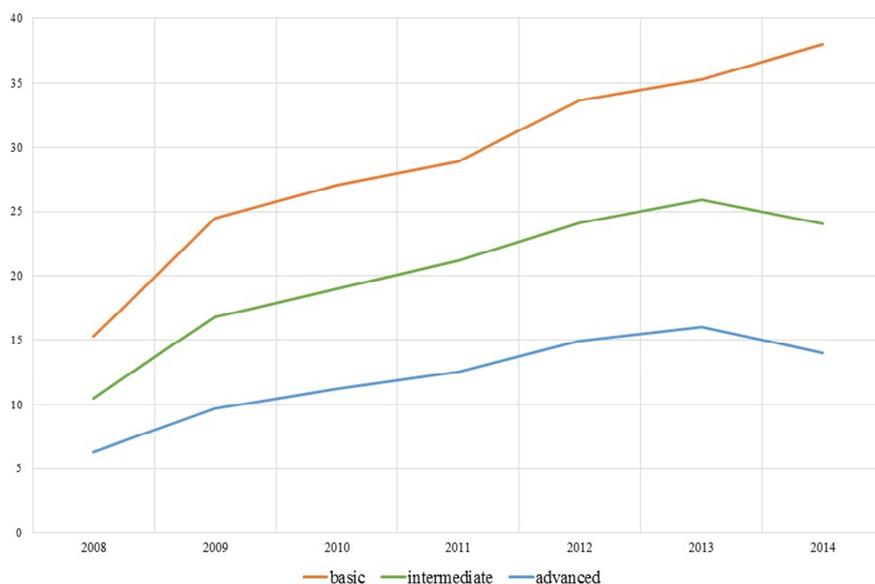


Figure 6. Unemployment rate (in %) by educational attainment in Spain in the last recent years

Source: Adapted from Ilostat and the Institute of Statistics of Spain (2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

More Mobile Students, But With Differences

The number of mobile students in Spain has increased in the analysed period. It is an opportunity for universities as they can compensate part of their revenues reduction (Hawthorne, 2010) especially in Spain where the revenues have decreased substantially due to economics and demographics reasons. But also, it is an opportunity to increase the recruitment of top skilled workers from abroad, improving the attractiveness and competitiveness in the international framework (Marginson & Considine, 2000).

With regard to the latter, from the 1900s Spain started several initiatives in order to facilitate the inflow of mobile students. There are many bilateral agreements with third countries which facilitate students' mobility and scientific cooperation. Moreover, universities also arrange agreements with universities and scientific institutions from abroad. Within the European Union, numerous programmes have also been established, such as Erasmus Mundus.

According to Eurostat (2013), in 2008 undergraduate mobile students² represented 2.14% of total students in Spain, and in 2012 yet 2.84%, meaning a growth of 0.7% in the referenced period. Furthermore, Spanish students going abroad accounted for 0.57% of the total number of mobile students in 2008 and 0.86% in 2012 (0.29% growth), respectively. Compared with European Union (EU), mobile students that came from abroad counted 10.43% in 2012 (1.35% in 2008), and those going abroad were 8.07% (4.37% growth in 2008). Another important issue is that according to the annual report of Education released by OECD "Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States together received more than 50% of all foreign students worldwide" (OECD, 2014, p. 345).

In addition, several imbalances in the Erasmus programme were also observed (Figure 7). The number of Erasmus students in the field of Arts and Humanities was bigger when it comes to mobile students in Spain, which is contrary to the field of Engineering and Architecture, where the Spaniards going abroad represented a higher percentage (Michavila, 2013).

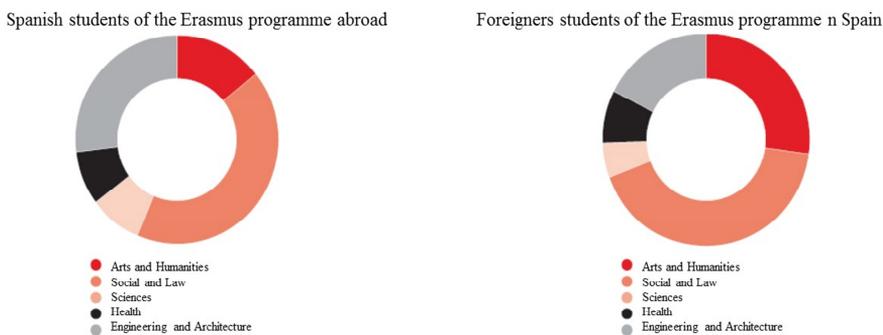


Figure 7. Erasmus students by fields of study in Spain 2013 (in %)

Source: Foundation for Knowledge and Development, CYD annual report, 2013.

In the case of public universities mobile students are predominantly concentrated in four regions, namely: Madrid, Cataluña, Andalucía and Valencia; and regarding private Universities: in Madrid and Cataluña (Figure 8). These regions concentrate the largest number of Universities and faculties in Spain (Figure 3 and Figure 9).

A significant proportion of mobile students come from European, Latin America and Caribbean countries.

The general tendency is that mobile and domestic students enrol in public

²Mobile students: "who have crossed a national border and moved to another country with the objective to studying" (Eurostat, 2013, p. 40).

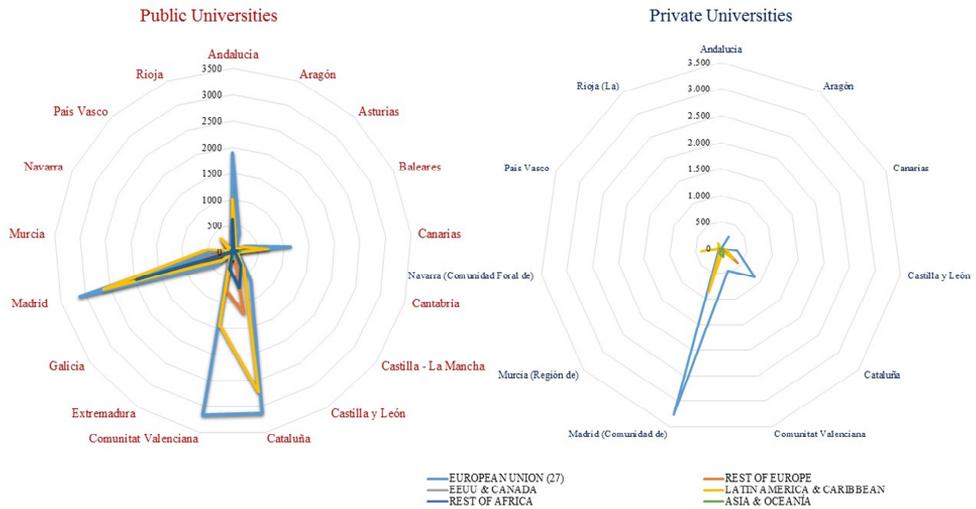


Figure 8. Mobile students in Spain by home and host region and type of University in Spain 2014
 Source: Adapted from the Ministry of Education of Spain (2014).

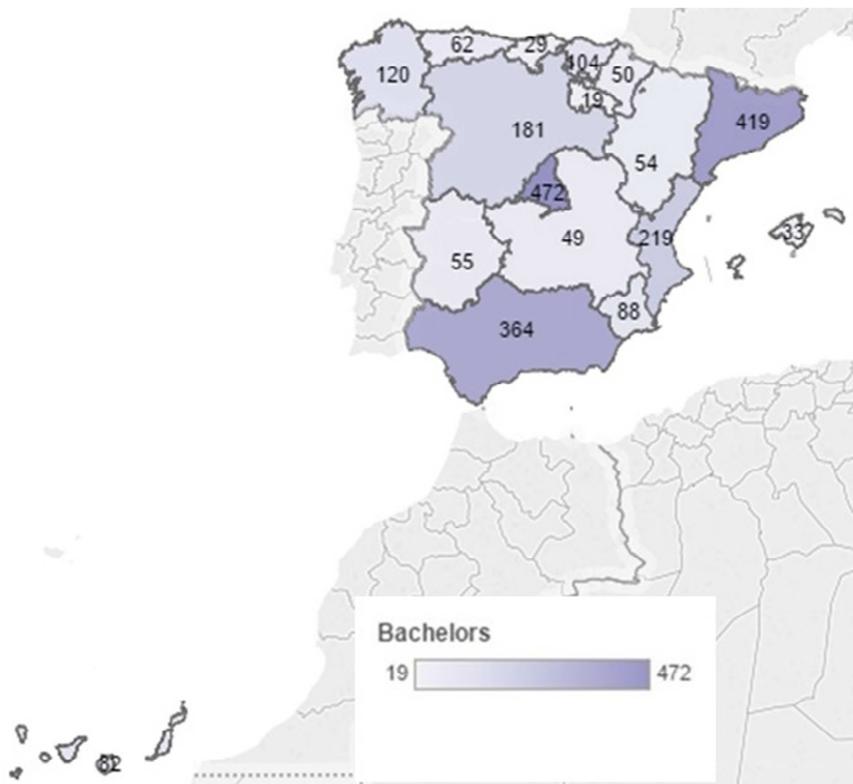


Figure 9. Bachelor Degrees by Spanish region in Spain 2014
 Source: Adapted from the Ministry of Education of Spain (2014).

Universities. According to the Ministry of Education in Spain the latter represented in 2015 approximately 87.2 % of all enrolments (and 3.67% constituted mobile students) and 79.4% of bachelor degrees.

However, the number of private Universities has increased in the last years. In 2001 there were 50 public Universities and only 15 privates, and in 2014 it was still 50 public (and 1 on-line) and yet 32 privates (5 were Universities operating on-line), respectively. Private Universities account for 40% of Universities and 20.6% of bachelor degrees (Figure 9), totalling 12.8% of all students (4.07% of them were mobile students). Figure 10 shows the distribution of mobile students by regions and the type of University: public and private.

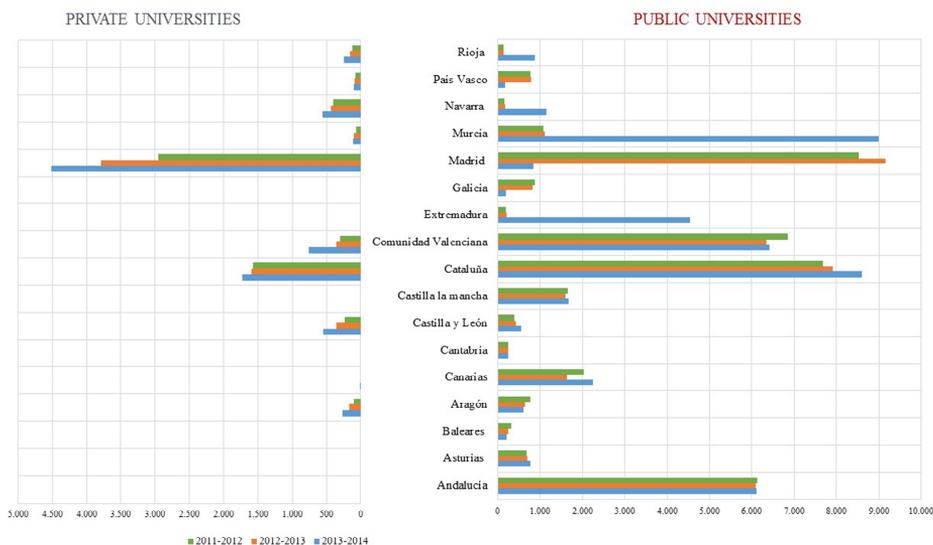


Figure 10. Evolution of mobile students in Spain by type of University and regions in the years 2011-2014

Source: Adapted from the Ministry of Education of Spain (2014).

More Changes, More Challenges

As stated in the OECD's Education Report (2014), some of the reasons influencing mobile students' decisions concerning destination choices are: language of instruction, quality of programmes, tuition fees and immigration policies.

The Spanish language prevalence is typical for Spain, though the number of institutions that offer programmes in English is growing, which can be attributed to rising international demand (40% of world mobile students enrolled in English-speaking programmes between 2000 and 2012).

Concerning the quality of academic institutions, it is not clear the influence of international educational rankings on the mobile students' pattern, nevertheless these rankings receive a growing attention which is the way to improve the quality of educational institutions.

Concerning the tuition fees, mobile students receive the same conditions as domestic students in most European countries (OECD, 2014). Under Bologna plan, degrees are generally structured as follows: 3 years + 2 years (Bachelor + Master). Regarding Spain (as of 2006) it is 4 + 1 (Bachelor + Master) (Michavila, 2013), but additionally from 2015 the system 3 + 2 years is elective for each region. In public universities students are obliged to pay around 20% of total costs, except the students with scholarship who are exempt from incurring any costs.

In Spain the academic year 2009-2010 (Figure 11) brought a substantial change in the field of tuition fees. The more intensive effects of the recession implied a severe deterioration of economic factors, and simultaneously the strongest restrictive policies were applied deeply diminishing the education budget and expenditures (Michavila, 2012). It implied a strong increase of fees for all academic services and studies at all levels. From that moment on mobile students from countries that do not have education agreement with Spain must pay 100% of tuition fees in public Universities.

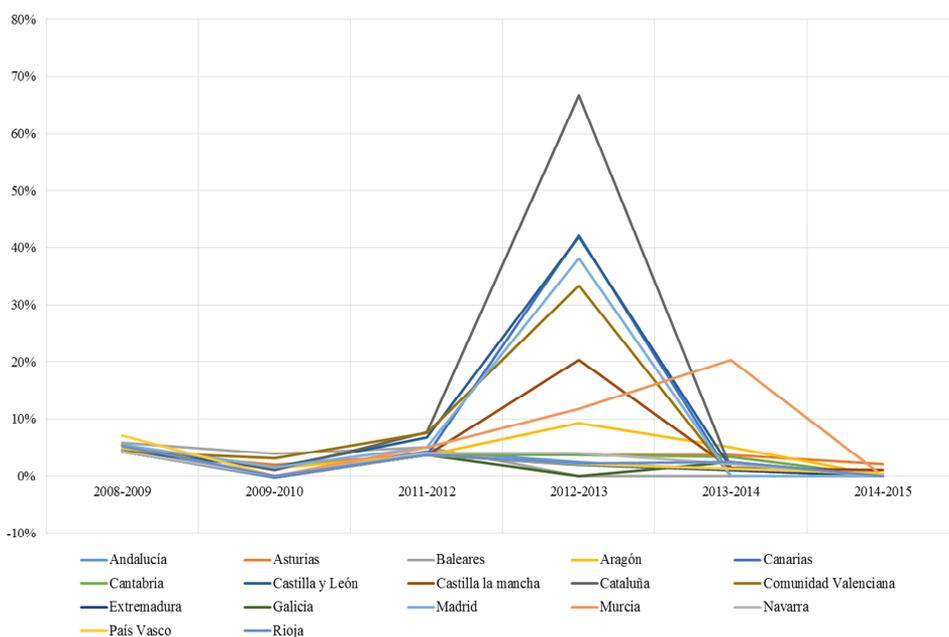


Figure 11. Annual variation rate of bachelor tuition fees in public Universities by Spanish regions in the years 2008-2015

Source: Adapted from the Ministry of Education of Spain (2014).

Moreover, there is a considerable dispersion of tuition fees among regions, Universities and in the field of studies, which constitutes an important change, particularly from 2010. For instance, when it comes to bachelor degrees it ranged from 11.89 EUR and 33.52 EUR per ECTS credit for public Universities (a regular course averaged 60 credits) in the period 2013-2014 (Ministry of Education of Spain, 2015). In turn, in the case of private universities, an average price is even more complicated to calculate due to the lack of data and substantial imbalances between different universities and for different fields

of studies. However, examining the available price lists for each University in 2013-2014, it averaged around 132 EUR per ECTS credit³.

Consequently, the scholarship programs interest increased from 22-24% in 2008 to 32% in 2011, but at the same time the requirements to obtain a grant became more restrictive, so the total number of scholarships granted remained the same, and simultaneously the volume of scholarships awarded shows a lower increase in the last years (Michavila, 2012). However, it grew from an average of 2085 EUR in 2002 to 3.190, 56 EUR in 2013 and depended on the field of studies (Ministry of Education of Spain, 2015).

Due to the recession a similar situation regarded international level, diminishing scholarships and subsidies. Therefore, the improvement of resources accessibility will be vital for future student mobility. However, Spain placed 7th in the ranking of countries with the percentage of GDP spent on financial aids in higher education in 2010 (the OECD average was 0.31% against 0.11% of Spain) (Michavila, 2013).

As pointed out, economic factors constitute one of the reasons for the reduction of Spanish students and the resulting income reduction. Therefore mobile students have become a very important source of income for private and public universities, and there is a need to put in place certain immigration policies "to encourage the temporary or permanent immigration of international students (OECD, 2014, p. 348).

Traits and Importance of Teachers

"The quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers" (OECD, 2014, p. 410). The number of teachers is adjusted in so that it corresponds with the budget reduction. In public universities of Spain the percentage of native teachers is 98%, whereas in the case of private universities is the 95.3%. About half of foreign teachers come from European Union, with the exception of the arts and humanities field (79%) (Ministry of education of Spain, 2015).

The percentage of teachers who hold a PhD degree is 70.4% for public Universities and only 43.4%, and this proportion - has been decreasing for the last few years, for both types of Universities (Ministry of education of Spain, 2015). Furthermore, PhD teachers are more concentrated in the field of sciences, 90%, but teacher-to-student ratio in this field is the lowest (4.4 students) with regard to other fields (for instance, it is 20.5 students per teacher in Social Sciences).

Recruitment would be an excellent opportunity for universities to enable to further improve their quality, particularly those foreigners highly skilled (Marginson & Considine, 2000). Recently, the number of Spanish teachers decreased considerably together with the budget reductions. Although the proportion of foreign teachers is very low their number is gradually rising, especially in private Universities (possibly it relates with the creation of new private Universities in the last decade or it might also be the case because of different requirement). When it comes to public Universities, this number grew (except in 2013) and since 2014 the positive tendency has been resumed. The most relevant fact is that the number of foreign teachers varies significantly depending on the region and the university, but in any case foreign teachers are highly concentrated in the

³Tuition fees depend on several factors such as the region, University, field of study, level of experimentalism, grants, discounts, the number of times that the student repeat the same subject, therefore this calculation is an approximate average.

same 4 regions as the mobile students, and where also the number of universities and students is the highest (Figure 12).

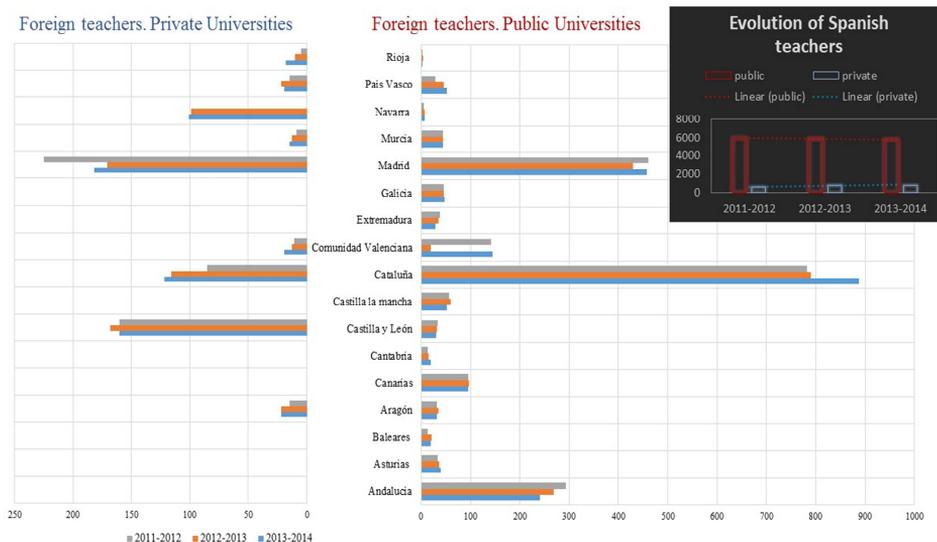


Figure 12. Evolution of the number of teachers by Spanish regions in the years 2011-2014

Source: Adapted from the Ministry of Education of Spain (2014).

In addition, there is a world shortage of teachers (OECD, 2014), in particular concerning the higher education. All economic factors such as the level of earnings, unemployment and taxes, education spending are very important to attract international teachers and researchers (Mihi-Ramírez et al., 2014). According to Eurostat (2014) about 77% of total public spending on education in Europe covers teachers' salaries. What is more, the lack of financial incentives makes it more difficult to retain teachers which also significantly affects the research capacity (OECD, 2014). From 2000 to 2005 the expenditure for Spanish higher education increased by 15% above the OECD average, and 20% above the EU average. However, this was realised because of the increase in expenditures whereas the number of students barely changed at the same time (Michavila, 2013). In the period between 2005 and 2010 the number of students increased faster than education expenditures.

Spanish public universities' incomes decreased by 14% in 2012 as compared to 2009. Regarding the private universities incomes, they rose by 4.5% in 2012 and 0.5% in 2013. Taken as a whole, the worse economic conditions, the reduction of the number of Spanish students and the growing competition can explain this decrease. Therefore, a reasonable strategy would take into account mobile students and greater internationalization of studies and universities. Although it entails considerable expenditures, it can be viewed as an investment with potential for future returns. Hence, the greater economic effort are done now, the higher potential improvement can be expected in the future. This would facilitate an increase in incomes, a better quality system and the recruitment of highly skilled students and teachers (Thurow, 1970; Becker, 1971; Mixon, 1992; Marginson & Considine, 2000; Hawtorhne, 2010).

CONCLUSIONS

This research provides information regarding current problems, challenges, changes and opportunities concerning higher education mobility, as shown in the analysis of the case of Spain and through international comparisons.

The potential advantages of gaining an international degree such as better labour opportunities and earnings, increased the number of students who study abroad, especially after the economic collapse of 2008. Education matters, and the situation of Spain in the recent years exemplifies and confirms this trend. But also it constitutes an excellent opportunity for the host countries for higher incomes' growth and greater number of highly skilled workers.

Yet, despite the apparent advantages, there are important differences in students' migration flows between countries, regions and universities. For instance, in the case of Spain mobile students represent nearly 3% of total students number, and they are concentrated in the few regions which have the biggest number of students, resources and universities, such as Madrid, Cataluña, Andalucía and Valencia. This number also depends on the field of studies. Spain receives the higher number of Engineering and Architecture students, but in the same time sends abroad more Humanities and social sciences students.

In addition, the public universities in Spain have a greater number of enrolled students than private universities, but only the number of private Universities has increased in the last few years in spite of the income restrictions and the adverse economic circumstances.

More English-language studies' programmes would probably increase the number of mobile students and international highly skilled staff. It would further help to face the problem of national students' reduction caused by higher tuition fees and scholarships' problems, particularly with a view to bigger dispersion of tuition fees across regions in the last few years.

Last but not least, likewise in the case of mobile students, foreign teachers are scarce, although their number is rising especially in the same region where foreign students are concentrated, though it still represents only a small proportion of overall teaching staff. They improve the quality of higher education system because they have higher knowledge and skills, but it is difficult to attract and retain them in view of the budget restrictions. Therefore, it requires considerable expenditures and can be viewed as an investment with potential for future returns.

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Author

Antonio Mihi-Ramírez

PhD. His research focuses on the economic implications of international migration at international and national level in different economics sector. He is a Professor at the Department of International and Spanish Economics at Granada University.

Correspondence to: Dr. Antonio Mihi-Ramírez, Granada University. Faculty of Economics and Business. Campus Cartuja, 18071, Granada, Spain, e-mail: amihi@ugr.es

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