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Evaluating the unquantifiable:

A case study examining the transformative outcomes of international higher education

Doctoral thesis

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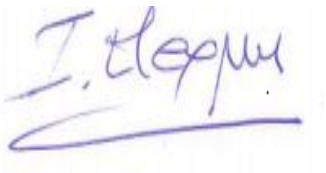

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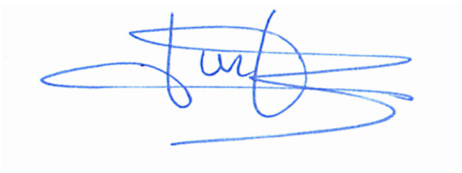

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ABSTRACT

The internationalisation of higher education has been high on the agenda of governments and educational institutions for the past decades, driven by a wide range of instrumental and humanistic rationales. Concomitantly, as public and private investments to incorporate the international dimension in higher education grew, there emerged a need for stakeholders to implement programme evaluations to respond to both external and internal demands for learning and accountability. In this scenario, quantifiable indicators have become dominant outcome measures due to the flexibility, clarity, comparability, and transparency they facilitate. However, this practice presents a few caveats, such as undermining the unquantifiable contributions of international higher education for student and societal transformation.

Through a compendium of three publications, the overarching objective of this dissertation is to employ an explanatory and transformation-based approach to evaluating the outcomes of international higher education. Firstly, it frames Martha Nussbaum's capability achievements as fundamental to a positively transformative education, thus providing a sound basis for judgments of educational programmes' worth and legitimacy based on unquantifiable yet equally meaningful standards. Secondly, it draws on critical realism as a metatheory to substantiate the importance of adopting qualitative and explanatory approaches in evaluations conducted in the education domain. Additionally, this work contributes to ethical practices in social research by addressing the methodological and ethical implications of collecting data involving a geographically dispersed international student population.

This work adopts an embedded case study research design, whereby a single case (an international master's programme in education studies) is built around multiple units of analysis (international students). *Publications 1* and *3* examine the case programme outcomes, with the former being descriptive and policy-based and the latter more explanatory hinging on social and philosophical theories. *Publication 2* tackles the ethical dimension of the internet-based methods adopted in *Publications 1* and *3*.

The analysis found that the international education programme analysed was instrumental in the development of participants' capabilities pertaining to their intellectual, social, and professional lives. These capability achievements were mediated by the programme's international and non-international features as well as a combination of agentic and structural factors. For work capabilities, structural factors have induced a particularly modulating effect, with historical events, hiring practices, and employer expectations playing a significant role in students' employment outcomes. In relation to the ethical dimension of online data collection, it was found that the internet offers a rich and convenient means for obtaining quantitative and qualitative while also generating a number of ethical concerns. As such, specific considerations are outlined with regard to adapting traditional ethical guidelines in the online context. Overall, this dissertation offers both theoretical and methodological insights towards a kind of higher education that is ethical, impactful, and supportive of individual and collective flourishing.

Keywords. International higher education; Erasmus Mundus; programme evaluation; capability approach; critical realism; research ethics

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What we know is a drop,

What we don't know is an ocean.

Isaac Newton

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ACRONYMS

CA	Capability Approach
CR	Critical Realism
EM	Erasmus Mundus
ERASMUS	European Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students
EU	European Union
HE	Higher Education
HEIs	Higher Education institutions
LLL	Lifelong Learning
MALLL	European Master's in Lifelong Learning: Policy and Management

INTRODUCTION

The internationalisation of higher education has been high on the agenda of governments and educational institutions for the past decades. Driven by macro trends such as globalisation and competition (Van der Wende, 2009; Teichler, 2004), regional integration (Teichler, 2004), and marketisation (Brooks & Waters, 2003; Van der Wende, 2001), adopting a more international orientation has become a strong imperative in the current educational context. While internationalisation supposes a broad spectrum of actions linked to curricular content, pedagogy, learning assessment, research agreements, and community involvement (Knight, 2012), it is more generally defined as 'the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education' (Knight, 2003), p. 2).

One of the more popular actions associated with internationalisation is physical mobility (Van der Wende, 2001). In Europe, arguably the most visible and successful initiative in this domain is the European Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS) (Teichler, 2001). Established in 1987, it aimed for short-term geographical movement among European students to contribute to human capital formation (Papatsiba, 2005) and mutual cooperation between culturally similar countries (Teichler, 1996). ERASMUS significantly boosted the visibility and uptake of intra-regional learning in Europe, given that only less than 1% of the student population was considered transnationally mobile prior to its implementation (Blitz, 2003).

Following the discursive shift towards the need for a more globally competent and knowledge-driven Europe reflected in the Lisbon Strategy of 2000 and the Barcelona Council of 2002, the Erasmus Mundus (EM) at the postgraduate level was launched in 2014. In contrast to the ERASMUS programme, The EM promoted joint degrees and the participation of international students outside the European Union (EU). Its goals were both instrumental and humanistic,

aiming to boost Europe's economic competitiveness and graduate employability as well as to promote dialogue and understanding between cultures. In 2013, EM realised an important transition as it joined the umbrella programme Erasmus+ brought about by reforms at the intergovernmental level to foster the interplay of development of human and social capital, sustainability, and inclusion through a cohesive and wider education and training strategy.

The focused strategy on student mobility as an element of internationalisation has significantly increased the rate of cross-border learning overall. Worldwide, the number of international students has quintupled since the 1970's, growing from 0.8 to a total of 4.1 million in 2013 (UNESCO, 2015). This number has further increased since then, with the 2017 estimate being at 5.3 million (The UNESCO Institute for Statistics, n.d.). Statistical data also show that only within the European Union, there are a total of 1.7 million international tertiary students enrolled (Eurostat, 2019).

With massive public and private investments in internationalisation and the more complex organisation involved in cross-border activities, it has become more important for governments and educational institutions to track their efforts. A common approach is to use measurements and indicators either to gain a comprehensive picture of organisational initiatives (mapping) or to judge the value of internationalisation activities using normative standards (evaluation) (Beerkens, et al., 2010). The latter is especially interesting for stakeholders, as they serve as evidence of success and goal attainment (Deardorff & van Gaalen, 2012). Inputs, outputs, and outcomes are often employed in such assessments at the macro (international, national), meso (institutional, programme) and micro levels (individual) (Hudzik & Stohl, 2009; Deardorff & van Gaalen, 2012). While there are variations in existing definitions, Hudzik & Stohl (2009) regard inputs as the resources needed to pursue internationalisation, outputs the quantifiable dimensions of the activities implemented, and outcomes the achievement of goals that justify the worth of the programme or task undertaken.

In the context of international mobility programmes in Europe, a variety of quantitative output and outcome indicators are used to evaluate meso and micro level achievements. For example, the External Evaluation on the Professional Value of Erasmus Mobility (VALERA) study

(Bracht et al., 2006) examined programme-related input (teaching staff), output (completion rates categorised by demographics) and outcomes (student satisfaction, host country knowledge, language proficiency, and personal development). Outcomes such as discipline-specific knowledge, language proficiency, and international competences were also assessed in various commissioned studies (Bracht et al., 2006; Terzieva & Unger, 2019; Kruger, Klein, Pinkas, Hopfner, & Kuske, 2017). With a focus on employability, Hemmer et al. (2011) also used a set of indicators for mobility, competence development, and employment rates to evaluate Erasmus Mobility master's programmes. The Erasmus Impact Study (European Commission, 2014) is another effort in this domain, analysing the effects of mobility among bachelor's, master's, and doctoral students through skills and employability.

Table 1 . A non-exhaustive summary of commissioned evaluation reports on the student outcomes of European student mobility programmes

Dimensions evaluated	Authors
Competences and skills	Bracht et al., 2006; Bryla & Domanski, 2015; European Commission, 2014; Kruger, Klein, et al., 2017
Personality traits	European Commission, 2014
European citizenship	European Commission, 2014
Mobility patterns	Bryla & Domanski, 2015; European Commission, 2014; Hemmer et al., 2011; Kruger, Klein, et al., 2017; Teichler, 1996
Student preparedness for the labour market	ICU.net AG, 2014; Terzieva & Unger, 2019
Subsequent employment	Bracht et al., 2006; European Commission, 2014; Hemmer et al., 2011; Kruger, Klein, et al., 2017; Teichler, 1996;
Student satisfaction	Bracht et al., 2006; ICU.net AG, 2014; Kruger, Klein, et al., 2017; Kruger & Klein, 2015

The use of quantifiable indicators as measures of success is a favoured option due to the flexibility, clarity, comparability, and transparency they facilitate (Deardorff, Pysarchik, & Yun, 2009; Bagnall, 1994). However, there are important points to be considered. In practice, evaluations often focus on inputs and outputs since the more complex nature of outcomes makes them generally more challenging to document (Green, 2012). As they are often multi-dimensional, evaluators struggle with establishing clear and comparable definitions (Hemmer et al., 2011), resulting in a situation where 'what gets counted, counts' (Hudzik & Stohl, 2009, p. 14) and 'what is measured, or even measurable, often bears little resemblance to what is

relevant' (Perrin, 1998, p. 373). Biesta (2009) makes a similar argument, contending that there is an overwhelming concern for measuring what we intend to measure (technical validity) at the expense of measuring what we value (normative validity). As a result, we fail to capture educational value as it relates to unquantifiable outcomes such as well-being and public good (Unterhalter, 2017).

No matter the focus and approach, the conduct of program evaluations among a globally dispersed international student population has increasingly relied on internet technologies for data collection. Online surveys, interviews through video conferences, and email correspondence are some of the more common ways that information may be gathered from students (Convery & Cox, 2012). Even in localized communities, they are seen as a practical and useful means to collect information due to technology's ubiquity and ease of access. The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the valuable role of digital and online technologies to minimise the disruption of research activities in the face of travel restrictions. More recently, big data and related forms of data analytics have been increasingly used as unique sources in order to present more robust and agile evaluations of policies or services (UNDP, 2013). Yet over the past years, as privacy breach and data misuse have posed real threats to individual and collective well-being, there is a growing concern for making research more responsible and ethical, especially in digital environments where individual perceptions of privacy vary and where information may be archived and traced long after its intended use (British Psychological Society, 2013).

SCOPE AND RATIONALE

Considering the gaps stated above, this dissertation aims to examine the unquantifiable outcomes of international higher education through ethical internet-mediated research, providing an alternative vocabulary through which to judge educational value. While there is a strong case for facilitating expansive forms of education (Walker, 2012; Boni & Gasper, 2009) and that international study experiences are shown to facilitate deeply transformative

experiences (Marginson, 2014; Tran, 2015), this dimension has been largely under-developed in programme evaluations mainly because of its resistance to exact measurements.

Examining the issue of quantification and accountability in educational programme evaluation is of utmost importance. As Ball (2003) contends, 'the issue of who controls the field of judgment is crucial' (p. 216), and thus can significantly shape education delivery. For instance, value judgments that rely solely on quantitative indicators can lead to curricular simplification, whereby 'wisdom and understanding may be reduced to information, bodies of knowledge to facts, crafts to skills, sensitivity to behavioural acts, and humane virtues to attitudes' (Bagnall, 1994, p. 28). Indeed, the what, how, and why of evaluation carry implications for teaching, learning, the rules and practices generated in the field (Locke, 2015). This is especially salient in international higher education. In the midst of the dominance of quantitative indicators of success, some scholars argue for the need to revisit the fundamental question of purpose of international education, placing a renewed focus on its academic and societal value (Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011; Knight, 2013) that often elude exact measurements. This dissertation shows how a descriptive and quantitative approach to evaluation (as presented in *Publication 1*) may be enhanced by accounts revolving around the unquantifiable and transformative capacity of international higher education by employing the capability approach (CA).

The CA is an evaluative framework originally proposed by Amartya Sen (1999) that identifies the expansion of individuals' freedoms - referred to in literature as 'capability' - as the ultimate goal of social arrangements. From this perspective, the success of education is judged insofar as it provides individuals with real possibilities to achieve beings and doings that they have reason to value. Nussbaum (2011) has extended this initial proposal, identifying a set of substantial freedoms or 'capabilities' that must be guaranteed for human flourishing. *Publication 3*'s analysis primarily draws on Nussbaum's interpretation of the CA to evaluate the transformative aspect of international higher education through its capacity to enhance these forms of fundamental and expansive freedoms for the study participants. While the CA has been used with both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the discussion will focus on a

narrative-based analysis in order to reinforce the unquantifiable and non-utilitarian ends of educational processes (O'Shea & Lorenzi, 2015; Bagnall, 1994; Unterhalter, 2017).

OBJECTIVES

The overarching objective of this study is to employ alternative transformation-based conceptual tools in the ethical conduct of programme evaluation in international higher education through a case study. It is mainly guided by the research question: 'How can we more broadly and deeply evaluate the impact of international higher education on students' transformation using ethical internet-mediated research?' Answering the main research question implied responding to ethical and methodological (responsible internet-mediated research and data collection given a globally dispersed participant pool) as well as conceptual considerations (going beyond positivist approaches to programme evaluation) through four specific objectives, as follows:

Ethical and methodological considerations:

O1. Analyse the potential of online and internet-based means of qualitative data collection for programme evaluation in international education *(Publication 1)*

O2. Critically appraise the ethical implications of online data collection, analysis, and storage in internet-based research *(Publication 2)*

Conceptual considerations:

O3. Provide a qualitative and transformation-based evaluation of the outcomes of an international higher education programme *(Publications 1 and 3)*

O4. Operationalise the capability approach as a framework for international education programme evaluation through a case study *(Publication 3)*

THESIS STRUCTURE

This dissertation is composed of a compendium of publications providing methodological, ethical, and conceptual contributions to the field of programme evaluation in higher education (Table 2). The publications, which are presented chronologically by publication date, also illustrate the evolution of the author's inquiry process on the topic of educational evaluation.

The first article, which responds to Objectives 1 and 3, presents the results of an exploratory and descriptive analysis of the qualitative outcomes of an Erasmus Mundus master's programme in education studies. In addition to these empirical findings, it also contributes methodologically by testing the utility of social media as a tool for data collection. The internet has significantly altered the way individuals relate and interact, presenting researchers with a new venue for observing and understanding social phenomena and a rich source of data. Online methods are particularly interesting for studies concerning international participants due to their globally dispersed geographies and inability to participate in on-site data collection. *Publication 1*'s results yielded two conclusions: the need to further examine the ethical considerations of using internet technologies when conducting research with human participants (which was tackled in *Publication 2*) and the value of deepening and broadening the scope of higher education programme evaluations (as addressed in *Publication 3*).

Considering the new possibilities and possible pitfalls of the internet as a research tool in *Publication 1*, the second article addresses Objective 2 by presenting a critical appraisal of the ethical implications of internet-based research. It draws on the preliminary reflections on the ethics of online research presented in the first publication and provides an in-depth and critical discussion of the emerging yet limited guidance on the topic in preparation for the third publication's online interviews. It is projected to contribute more generally to ethically sound programme evaluations as online data collection becomes increasingly ubiquitous.

Lastly, the third publication responds to Objective 3 by expanding on the thin account presented in *Publication 1* to offer a thick and theoretically robust evaluation of the same programme. Thin scientific representations are differentiated from thick accounts in that the

former are descriptive while the latter are both descriptive and normative (Poznic, 2018). The evaluative framework utilised in *Publication 3* allowed explanations to accompany the outcome descriptions, thus providing a more in-depth methodology for programme evaluation. Additionally, *Publication 3* responds to Objective 4 by drawing on the CA and employing students' capability achievements as a proxy for educational outcomes.

Table 2. A summary of the publications included in the dissertation

Pub. No.	Type	Indexing	Impact Factor	H Index	Rank	Objective	Reference
P1	Journal Article	Web of Science ESCI; Scopus	Scimago: 0.22	3	Q3	O1, O3	Anabo, I. F., & Elexpuru-Albizuri, I. (2017). LinkedIn as a tool for higher education programme evaluation. *RED Revista de Educación a Distancia, 53*(8), 1-17.
P2	Journal Article	Web of Science SSCI; Scopus	JCR: 2.068 Scimago: 0.783	47	Q1	O2	Anabo, I. F., Elexpuru-Albizuri, I., & Villardón-Gallego, L. (2019). Revisiting the Belmont Report's ethical principles in internet-mediated research: Perspectives from disciplinary associations in the social sciences. *Ethics and Information Technology, 21*, 137-149.
P3	Book Chapter	Web of Science SSCI; Scopus	N/A	N/A	N/A	O3, O4	Anabo, I. F., Elexpuru-Albizuri, I., & Villardón-Gallego, L. (forthcoming). International students' well-being achievements through the lens of the capability approach: A case study. *Quality of life: An interdisciplinary perspective.* Taylor & Francis.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The evaluative work presented here is informed by both critical realism (CR) and the CA, acting as a metatheory and a normative framework, respectively. The CR was especially relevant in establishing a clear ontological view of social and educational phenomena and justifying the resulting epistemological decisions taken in the study. More specifically, it has informed the dissertation by:

- defining the explanatory rather than the descriptive focus of the work,
- justifying the qualitative approach to evaluation,
- justifying the use of alternative forms of reasoning and knowledge production, and

- highlighting the importance of both structure and agency in exploring the contributing factors and dynamics that shaped the participants' outcomes.

Meanwhile, the CA acts as a normative framework, setting what should be promoted in an education of quality and providing a loose standard on which quality assessments may be conducted.

Critical Realism as a metatheory: Defining the study's ontological and epistemological positions

Any scientific exercise must begin with a critical reflection on the study's underlying set of assumptions about reality (ontology) and the methodological choices that are made as a result of this understanding (epistemology) (Danermark, Ekstrom, Jakobsen, & Karlsson, 2002). For value judgments involved in evaluation research, such definitions are equally important as they inform the design and content of such assessments. Stern (2004) identifies three traditions alluding to diverging interpretations of reality: the positivist, constructivist, and realist philosophies.

Positivism stems from an understanding that there is an independent and objective reality that can be measured and studied through observation and verifiable knowledge. This ontological position translates to the adoption of inquiry methods based on tests and instruments. While offering rich possibilities for comparative assessments to be made, the quantitative epistemology arising from this approach has been argued to be problematic. More specifically, Biesta (2009) contends that quantitative data is hardly a good measure for decision-making beyond the natural sciences. The empirical regularities demonstrated by variables statistically behaving in a certain way do not guarantee causality, accurately predict events, allow for replication of outcomes, nor explicate the process through which they were achieved in open systems such as the social sciences and education (Danermark et al., 2002).

On the other hand, a constructivist ontology assumes a socially constructed reality that defies objective evaluation. As a result, it may only be studied in the context of a specific theoretical or value framework. For evaluations, this paradigm requires the active engagement and

consensus of agents through hermeneutic and dialogic means (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Stern, 2004). While providing space for nuanced and participative evaluations, it has been criticised to overplay the human experience, and thus unable to sufficiently address other ways of generating knowledge about the world (Clark, 2012).

Scientific realism sits between positivism and constructivism. It shares both the positivists' ontological view of an objective world and the constructivists' epistemological concern for theory (Stern, 2004). Realist scholars (Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Bhaskar, 2008a, 2008b) are concerned with not just describing outcomes as empirical regularities (as what is expected in positivism) but also in the causal relationships that drive them (Astbury & Leeuw, 2010). A specific form of realism – critical realism – shares this ontological position with reservations. The CR coincides with the realist ontological position of an objective reality and the natural fallibility of empirical knowledge. However, CR presents a few fundamental differences. It subscribes to a stratified understanding of reality, which operates in three domains: the empirical, the actual, and the real (Bhaskar, 2008a). The knowable reality resides in the empirical, including observable phenomena and individual perspectives that are accessed through scientific inquiry. The actual and the real domains, meanwhile, embody the objective reality regardless of our construction of it: the actual represents the outcomes and events in the world and the real alludes to the mechanisms and forces that drive them (Clark, 2012). As such, 'where empirical realism finds a 'flat' reality, reducible to events that can be observed, critical realism sees a deep dimension, comprising mechanisms that produce events in the world' (Danermark et al., 2002, p. 203). CR's attempts to understand the mechanisms (residing in the real level) to explain lived events (in the empirical level) are framed as a result of interactions between structure and agency (Clark, 2012). Thus, social phenomena are viewed not as empirical regularities but as the result of the reproductive or transformative action by agents as shaped by the constraints and affordances imposed by the structure in which they operate (Bhaskar, 2008b).

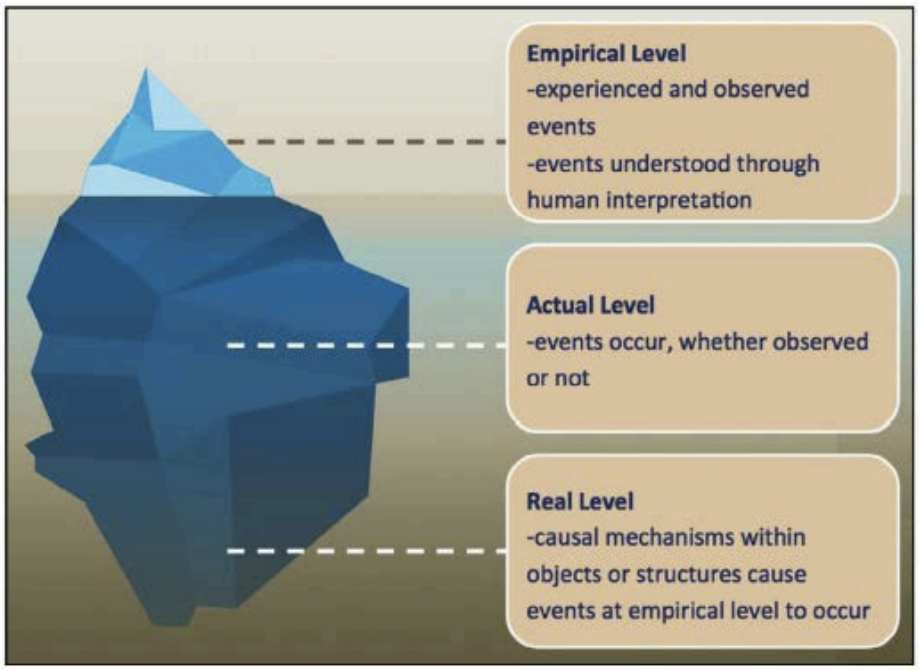

Figure 1. Fletcher's iceberg metaphor for CR ontology (from Fletcher, 2017, p. 183). https://tandfonline.com

CR likewise posits that unlike experiments to study the physical world, social and educational phenomena operate in an open system that involves changing properties, thus making controlled approaches to establish cause and effect virtually impossible (Scott & Bhaskar, 2010). This assumption has an important epistemological implication, in that alternative modes of inference such as abduction and retroduction – both involving conceptual abstraction rather than observation - are considered equally valid means of knowledge production. Abduction uses theory to reconstruct phenomena while retroduction employs counterfactual thinking to establish the conditions that can explain observable events (Danermark et al. 2002).

The CR's view of a stratified reality, the effects of the interactions between structure and agency on behaviour, and the open and changing nature of social systems have influenced the study in four ways. Firstly, it justifies the explanatory rather than the descriptive focus of the work. Instead of simply describing the students' observed and reported achievements in exact numerical terms, the study covers the qualitative and unquantifiable changes that the participants experienced as well as the underlying combination of factors that drive them. Secondly, the CR supports the use of in-depth qualitative data rather than experimental and

purely quantitative analyses. As Danermark et al. (2002) observe, a qualitative approach - especially through a case study - is particularly suitable for examining underlying mechanisms. Thirdly, it legitimises the use of alternative inferencing tools such as abductive and retroductive reasoning, thereby acknowledging the complexity of the social phenomenon being studied. Abductive reasoning involves engaging with data to form a plausible hypothesis explaining what was observed, while retroductive reasoning relies on a non-formalised inferencing technique relying on a reconstruction of the conditions that may explain the phenomenon in question (Danermark et al., 2002). The application of abduction is evidenced by the use of the concepts agency and structure to discuss educational outcomes. Meanwhile, retroduction was applied by comparing different student cases and reconstructing the sets of conditions that could explain participants' convergent and divergent achievements. Lastly, the CR shows how students' lived experiences – educational outcomes included – are a result of the interactions between structure and agency. As such, these concepts were incorporated as categories of possible factors shaping the outcomes reported by the participants. Overall, adopting the CR's approach to inquiry can help transcend the limits of accountability and compliance by reinforcing a type of evaluation that embraces complexity, depth, and understanding.

The Capability Approach as a Normative Theory

As previously discussed, the CA serves as an alternative lens through which to understand the quality of educational interventions. The human development focus of the CA was of particular interest in the study as it reinforces a more holistic notion of educational value. Conceptualised by the economist Amartya Sen, the CA first emerged as a broad normative framework for a range of evaluative purposes that contrasts the prevailing utilitarian approaches (Robeyns, 2005) by considering the broader aspects of human flourishing and societal progress. More specifically, it proposes the idea that development's fundamental objective goes beyond monetary indicators of growth (e.g. gross development product and income rates) to focus on the space of possibilities (also referred to as capabilities) available for people to choose and pursue beings and doings that matter to them. The CA distinguishes between the terms 'capability' and 'functioning' in its framework. While the former is a person's potential and

'opportunity to achieve', the latter refers to his or her actual and achieved state (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007, p. 4). This distinction is central to Sen's idea of human flourishing, whereby individuals have real and effective possibilities to define and pursue a life they have reason to value.

While the CA has received considerable interest in academic and policy circles in recent years, several scholars have pointed out a number of limitations. For one, its focus on individuals raised concerns about the extent to which it can accommodate the influence and constraints of the social contexts in which they operate (Robeyns, 2005) as well as the extent to which individual freedom can operate without any form of restriction (Hart, 2013). However, Robeyns (2005) argues that this claim is largely unfounded, since the CA embodies a form of ethical rather than ontological individualism. This means that it does not claim to explain social phenomena nor offer a theory of society on the sole basis of individuals and their properties. Instead, 'it postulates that individuals, and only individuals, are the units of moral concern' (p. 107). Regardless, Deneulin & McGregor (2010) argue that a more explicit integration of the social and political nature of human development, acknowledging that the meanings attributed to the good life and the design of societal arrangements for well-being are subject to conflict and power dynamics. Another challenge in using the CA lies in its operationalisation (Flores-Crespo, 2007). Indeed, one such difficulty is the extremely challenging exercise of assessing individuals' freedoms or capabilities due to their counterfactual nature (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). For example, evaluations can identify those functionings that were chosen (such as being able to work) but not those that were foregone as a reasoned choice (such as choosing not to work due to poor wage conditions).

Notwithstanding these limitations, the CA ascribes an important role to education as an enabler of students' real opportunities to live a life they value - an orientation that is compatible with the broader humanistic functions of education (Flores-Crespo, 2007; Pham, 2015). As such, it is viewed as a promising framework to rectify the limitations of the prevailing accountability culture that overplays quantifiable results at the expense of equally meaningful

yet intangible outcomes. Additionally, several scholars have built upon Sen's scholarship to clarify, advance, and operationalise his proposal.

One of the more prominent authors in the field is Nussbaum (2011), who diverges with Sen in a number of points. Unlike Sen (1999) who speaks of capability as a singular space of freedom composed of alternative combinations of achievements and functionings available to an individual, Nussbaum alludes to capabilities in the plural whereby 'a person's overall freedom is made up of a number of more specific freedoms' (Robeyns, 2017, p. 92). Simply put, her definition regards freedom as constitutive of various fundamental freedoms. Secondly, while Sen was reluctant to endorse exact configurations of what individuals' capability set should comprise of, Nussbaum argues that certain freedoms must be guaranteed and are in fact essential for a decent life, given that freedom does not always lead to positive action (Saito, 2003). These key freedoms which individuals are entitled to are embodied in her list of ten central capabilities (Table 3).

Table 3. Nussbaum's list of capabilities (adapted from Nussbaum, 2011)

Capability	Description
Life	Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living
Bodily health	Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter
Bodily integrity	Being able to go where you want to go
Senses, imagination, and thought	Being free to imagine, think and reason. Having access to cultural experiences, literature, art and so on; Having freedom of expression, including political and religious
Emotion	Being able to attach to other things and people outside ourselves; experiencing grief, longing, gratitude, and justified anger; Not being subject to fear and anxiety or blighted by trauma and neglect
Practical reason	Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life
Affiliation	Having the social bases of self- respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails provisions of non-discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin
Other species	Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature
Play	Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities
Control over one's environment	(A) Political. Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association.
	(B) Material. Being able to hold property (both land and movable goods) and having property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. In work, being able to work as a human being, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers

Sen's refusal to endorse capability lists was a rejection of exact prescriptions of what a valuable life should be, arguing that this ultimately rests on the individuals' own judgment. However, Walker (2006) suggests the use of lists may be justified, or even desired, in those instances when we seek to evaluate 'what it is we are distributing … and how well we are doing' (p. 63). This is particularly relevant in making value judgments in education.

There are a number of studies that have employed Nussbaum's list as a basis for conceptualizing and evaluating social issues such as gender equality (Robeyns, 2003; Walker, 2007) and higher education participation (Wilson-Strydom, 2016). In the field of education, McCowan & Unterhalter (2013) identified two broad categories of CA's specific applications: the distributional aspect of education and its substantive values and content. The former refers to the use of the capabilities as a lens to describe disadvantage and as a basis for conceptualising what we strive to equalise in and through education, and this objective has been carried out based on capability lists. The latter, meanwhile, employs the CA to determine which capabilities are important, whether they are being expanded in and by education, and how. Tackling the substantive elements of CA-based education feeds back into the distributive aspect, since capability enhancement in education is instrumental to democratic participation, emancipation, and an expansion of aspirations that help mitigate existing disadvantages (Boni & Wilson-Strydom, 2018). This body of work belongs to the substantive category, identifying the participants' capability achievements using Nussbaum's list and illuminating the ways with which the intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions of the programme contributed to these outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

This section presents a detailed description and justification of the study's choice of case study design. It also includes relevant information on the programme case, the participants' profiles for each publication, the data collection and analysis methods employed, the methodological sequence involved, as well as the study's ethical dimensions.

Research Design

This work employs a case study design, "an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon ('the case') in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (Yin, 2018, p. 50). As opposed to experimental forms of inquiry that purposefully isolate the phenomenon from its context to focus on specific variables, a case study is preferred when the research being undertaken aims to answer "a 'how' or 'why' question … about a contemporary set of events over which a researcher has little or no control" (ibid., p. 47). This is true for the study being undertaken, which involves a retrospective study on student outcomes that were shaped by multiple dimensions and hence cannot be extracted from the context of its operations. Case studies may be exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory (Yin, 2018), and this dissertation has touched upon these types throughout *Publication 1* (exploratory and descriptive) and *Publication 3* (explanatory).

More specifically, the case study approach adopted here is an embedded single-case design (Yin, 2018), whereby a single case (international education programme) is built around multiple units of analysis (international students). Case studies have been critiqued for its lack of inquisitive rigour, lack of basis for scientific generalisation, and the re-emergence of preference over true experiments (Yin, 2018). However, this can be rectified by a conscious effort and commitment to a systematic approach by operationalizing as many steps as possible. Yin further points out that while case study findings are not considered statistically generalizable, they are particularly useful for analytical generalisation by expanding and applying theories. In the context of the proposed study, there is no attempt to establish that the outcomes identified in the case study will be the same for other EM courses. However, the findings can provide insights on the relevance of contextual tensions in evaluating internationally HE programme outcomes and how CA concepts may be operationalised for analytical purposes. Lastly, the case study design is deemed especially compatible with the critical realist approach to evaluation. As Danermark et al. (2002) contend, the insights that

arise from comparisons between cases can illuminate the various conditions and forces that may explain the nature of and differences between student outcomes.

Case Description: Erasmus Mundus in Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning (LLL) has gained momentum as a policy focus in Europe in recent decades. With the increasing worldwide investment in LLL, there was a perceived need to develop professionals in the field with the necessary expertise to confront the challenges of education policymaking, practice, and administration in the 21st century.

In 2006, the Joint European Master's in Lifelong Learning: Policy and Management (MALLL) was launched as part of the Erasmus Mundus scheme. It involved a consortium of three EU partner universities (Institute of Education, UK, currently University College London following the official merger in 2015), Aarhus University in Denmark, and the University of Deusto in Spain. Students are required to spend a period in at least two of these higher education institutions. In August 2010, the University of Melbourne in Australia joined the programme as a third country partner and started to receive EU students in 2011 to spend a summer module after finishing their first year of studies. A large number of scholarships for third country students were made available through MALLL, with students from different countries having accessed and successfully completed the programme. Aside from scholarships, EM applicants may also proceed as self-funded students.

This case was chosen for two reasons. Firstly, while international forms of study have received large amounts of policy attention and investment in Europe, evaluations of such arrangements have mainly focused on large-scale studies involving more measurable and pragmatic indicators of student success such as employment rates, skills, and satisfaction levels. As such, it is worthwhile to explore other measures and consider the less tangible outcomes of education. The CA and its focus on freedom provide an alternative language through which to assess the fundamental and personally transformative gains of pursuing international education arrangements. Secondly, there are very few studies on the applications of the CA in international higher education (Pham, 2015; Boni & Calabuig, 2017; Martínez-Usarralde,

Murillo, & García-López, 2017; Lo, 2019). This work aims to contribute to the scientific literature in this underexplored area.

While the EM is often referred to as a student mobility scheme, the study adopts the broader term international higher education to reflect its multiple cross-border features. In this sense, we equate international education with having an 'internationalised curriculum' reflecting these elements (van der Wende, 1996):

- an international subject;
- a comparative perspective;
- an international professional orientation;
- inclusion of foreign language or cross-communication subjects;
- an interdisciplinary nature covering multiple regions;
- an internationally recognised professional qualification;
- a joint or double degree;
- compulsory participation in courses abroad taught by local lecturers; and
- specific content intended for foreign students.

Participants and selection process

With the exception of *Publication 2*, the works presented in this dissertation involved human participants, employing different sets of sampling procedures given the nature of the data collected.

For *Publication 1*, alumni LinkedIn profiles from the case programme were located using the existing LinkedIn group. Only those who successfully completed the programme were included (those from the first and seventh cohorts) and excluded current students at the time the study was conducted (eighth to tenth cohorts). As not all graduates were members of this group, a manual search was also implemented based on the master list procured from the programme administrators. Both the focused and the manual searches garnered 118 results, 75 of which met the study's inclusion criteria and were included in the analysis. This comprised almost half of the total number of existing alumni in that period and was deemed sufficient for preliminary

inferences to be made. Out of the total number of participants, 46 were females (61.33%) and 29 were males (38.66%).

The regional categories pertained to their home country's geographical grouping, and the categories Asia, Europe, North America, South America and Africa were used. 'Europe' was used in a general sense to refer to European countries within the EU-EEA zone, pre-accession Western Balkan countries, potential candidate countries, the Swiss confederation, and other countries that may be considered European through their status as a member of the Council of Europe (Russia, Ukraine, Armenia) (see Appendix 1 for a detailed description). A considerable number of the student profiles analysed are from Asia and Europe (Table 4).

Table 4. Number of study participants according to their geographical category (Publication 1)

Geographical category	Frequency
Europe	27
EU Member States and EEA-EFTA Countries	(14)
Non-EU/EEA-EFTA Countries	(13)
Asia	36
North America	6
South America	1
Africa	5
TOTAL	75

Meanwhile, data collection for *Publication 3* was implemented at a later date, at which point all cohorts of the programme case had already graduated. For this, non-probability sampling (Saumure & Given, 2008) was conducted based on accessibility (availability of email or LinkedIn contact), cohort representation (at least one student from each cohort), demographic information (country of origin, gender, and professional background), and the time component (recruiting students who graduated over five years ago and those who concluded their studies within the last five years, considering that the time that transpired after graduation

can have an effect on their outcomes and narratives). A list of possible participants was generated from these criteria.

Based on this list, those who were reachable via LinkedIn and who showed recent activity on the platform were contacted first. 23 students were notified, and 12 agreed to participate. More participants were then approached via email and other social media platforms until the demographic representation of the participants were deemed sufficient. Overall, there were 22 participants from different geographical, gender, and professional backgrounds interviewed. The reduced number of participants is considered adequate considering the qualitative and explanatory focus of the case study. As Mason (2010) contends, a large sample is not considered a requirement given that 'one occurrence of the data is potentially as useful as many in understanding the process behind a topic' (p. 1).

As opposed to the more general geographical categories adopted in *Publication 1*, the participants' geographical groupings in *Publication 3* were based on the more recent and detailed list published by the European Commission (2019) for the Erasmus+ programme (see Appendix 1 for a side-by-side comparison). 9 out of the 15 regions identified by the European Commission are represented in the study, as outlined in Table 5.

Table 5. Number of study participants according to their geographical category (Publication 3)

Geographical category	Frequency
European Union Member States	3
Non-EU Programme Country	3
Eastern Partnership Countries	2
Russian Federation	1
Latin America	2
Asia	8
Central Asia	1
Africa, Caribbean, and Pacific Countries	1
Other Industrialised Countries	1
TOTAL	22

Data collection and analysis

This compendium has drawn on a variety of data sources to respond to the specific objectives of each publication using a range of data collection instruments (Table 6). Publications 1 and 2 relied on public documents, policy texts, and social media profiles while Publications 1 and 3 drew on forum posts, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and participant questionnaires to fulfil the study's objectives.

Table 6. Summary of the three publications' data collection and analysis methods

Pub. No.	Data collected	Data collection method	Data analysis method	Objective
P1	Demographic and professional information from alumni's LinkedIn profiles	Content extraction from LinkedIn profiles	Descriptive statistics	O1, O3
	Alumni's perceptions about the programme from LinkedIn forum content	Content extraction from LinkedIn group forum	Directed content analysis of forum posts[1]	O1, O3
	Erasmus Mundus goals from European Commission documents and policy texts	Literature review	Inductive content analysis[2]	O3
P2	Ethical guidelines on internet-mediated research from disciplinary associations' documents	Literature review	Directed content analysis[1]	O2
P3	Alumni's demographic information	Online questionnaires	Descriptive account of student cases used in the analysis	O3
	Alumni´s narratives	In-depth semi-structured interviews	Directed content analysis of narratives[1]	O3

[1] *Hsieh & Shannon, 2005*

[2] *Elo & Kyngas, 2008*

One of *Publication 1*'s objectives involves the conduct of a qualitative evaluation of the outcomes of an international higher education programme (O3). As a first step, existing literature on the EM programme and its goals was conducted. This was followed by an inductive content analysis (Elo & Kyngas, 2008) of the documents available in order to develop the dimensions of evaluation. Based on this review, three goals emerged: mobility, employability, and interculturality. Descriptive statistics and directed content analysis were then conducted on the alumni's LinkedIn profiles and forum posts, respectively, to assess whether these three programme objectives were met. The culmination of this process contributed to the achievement of Objectives 1 and 3 of this dissertation's objectives (Table 2).

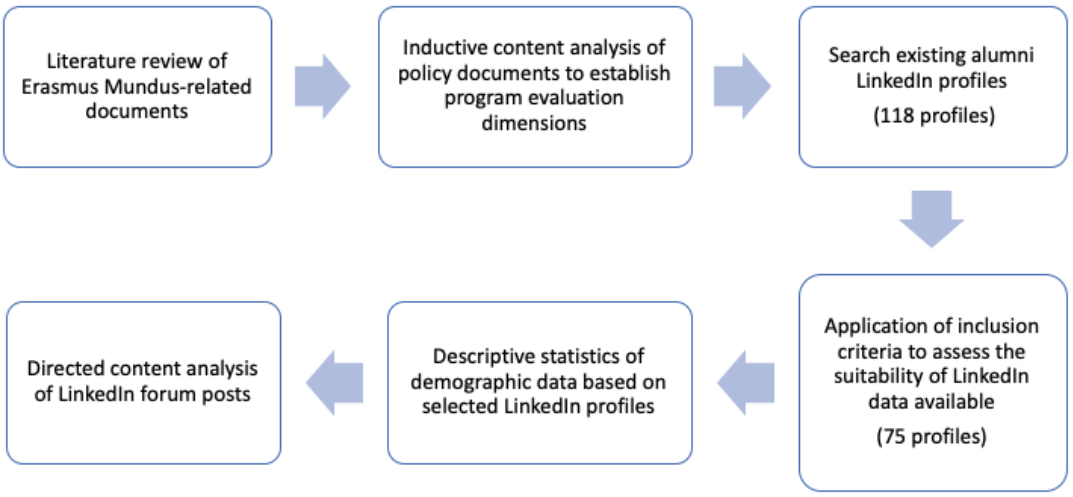

Figure 2. Publication 1: Overview of the data collection and analysis process

Publication 2, which sought to respond to the dissertation's second objective, analysed five sets of ethical guidelines from different disciplinary associations to examine the applications of key ethical principles from traditional research on the online setting. The texts reviewed involved gray literature, which broadly refers to non-commercially published materials such as reports, technical notes, and supplementary publications (Auger, 1998). Given the fast-paced evolution of internet technologies, these sources are deemed useful in examining the current patterns in ethical decision-making. A general search was conducted on the Google Platform, which garnered 10 million hits. The search was narrowed down to the top 100 results applying content, design, and quality criteria (Barry, 1994; Savoilanen & Kari, 2006; Xie et al., 2010). For the first criterion, only non-commercial publications from associations related to the social sciences were included. Following the design criterion, guidelines presented in the web page format were excluded, narrowing down the search to those presented as reports. Lastly, the quality criterion was applied, which included only the latest versions of the guidelines released from 2005 onwards to reflect the implications of the social networking turn during this period (Jones, 2011). Five documents were finally chosen and subjected to directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) using the Belmont Report's principles, including: Ethics Guidelines for Internet-Mediated Research by the British Psychological Society (BPS) in 2017, Ethics Guidelines and Collated Resources for Digital Research by the British Sociological Association

(BSA) in 2017, Ethical Guidelines for Internet Research by the National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH) in 2014, Ethical Decision-Making and Internet Research by the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) (Markham & Buchanan 2012), and Ethical Issues in Online Research by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (Jones 2011).

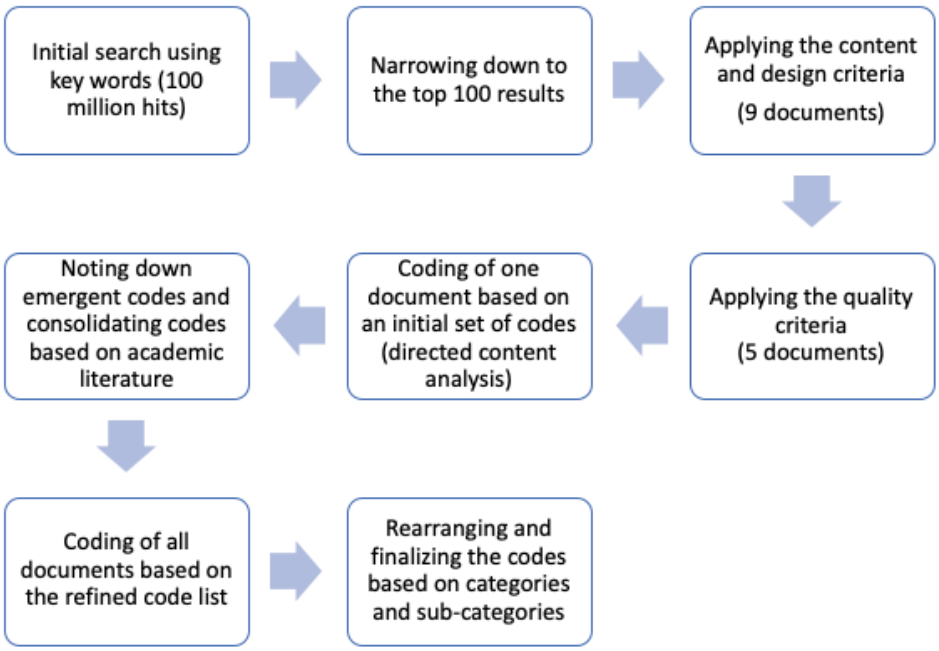

Figure 3. Publication 2: Overview of the data collection and analysis process

For *Publication 3*, online questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were employed to gather data from the 22 participants and respond to the dissertation's third and fourth objectives. The questionnaire instrument primarily served to collect the students' demographic information and informed consent. Meanwhile, the interviews revolved around participants' narratives of early life experiences, family and social backgrounds, international study experiences, and life post-graduation to gather students' perceptions, circumstances, and unique contexts. According to Bauer, McAdams, & Pals (2006), individuals use stories to derive meaning and to integrate otherwise disjointed life incidents. Narratives are also reflective of personal aspects such as growth and transformation, making them particularly useful given the focus of this study. Using the directed content analysis approach (Hsieh and Shannon 2005), the transcribed interviews underwent iterative rounds of systematic coding. The initial phase applied provisional coding (Saldaña 2013) to tag participants' outcomes using categories and

concepts from Nussbaum's list of central capabilities as well as possible factors that shaped them. Meanwhile, excerpts signifying possible contributing factors were coded using critical realist social analysis concepts (Danermark et al. 2002) such as 'structure' and 'agency'. The next round of coding involved processes of sub-coding (to reach a more detailed analysis of capability achievements) and causation coding (to attribute and connect certain capabilities to explanatory factors) (Saldaña, 2013). This was followed by a deliberation phase to clarify and refine the concepts and check for the appropriateness of codes in the tagged excerpts. A final round of coding ensued to reorder and finalise the relationships between the concepts, sketching the unique combinations of factors that led to specific capability outcomes.

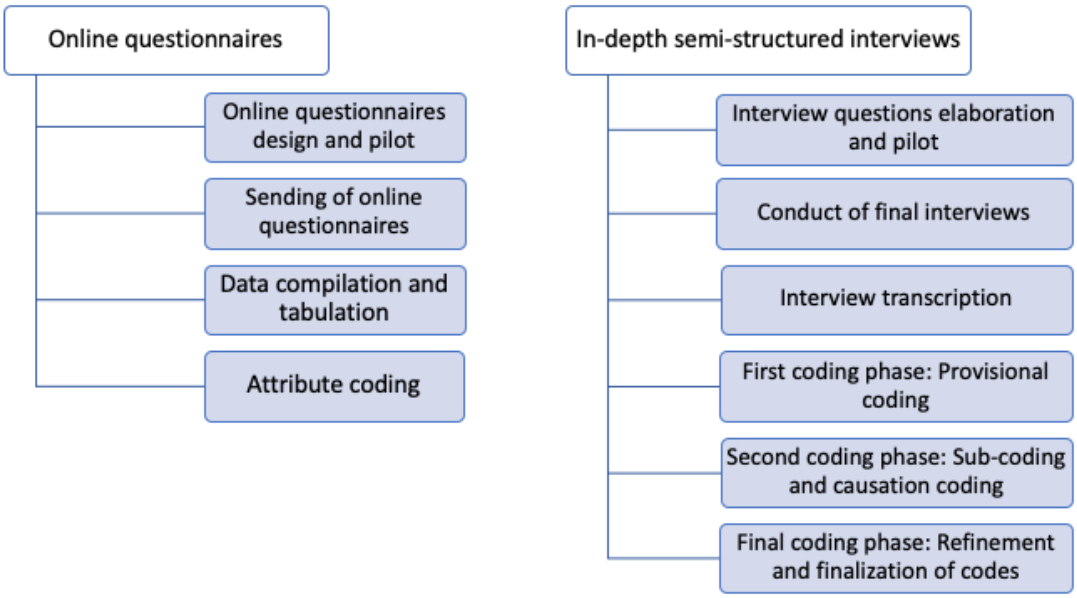

Figure 4. Publication 3: Overview of data collection and analysis process

The following sections will present the three publications comprising this thesis compendium – two articles in academic journals and one book chapter. They provide conceptual, methodological, and empirical analyses regarding the conduct of qualitative programme evaluation and ethical academic research in the field of international higher education.

PUBLICATION 1

REFERENCE

Anabo, I. F., & Elexpuru, I. (2017). LinkedIn as a tool for higher education programme evaluation. *RED Revista de Educación a Distancia, 53*(8), 1-17. http://dx.doi.org/10.6018/red/53/8

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LinkedIn as a Tool for Higher Education Programme Evaluation

LinkedIn como Instrumento para la Evaluación de Programas de Educación Superior

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Abstract

The aim of this research was to conduct a preliminary evaluation of the outcomes of the European Masters in Lifelong Learning: Policy and Management (MALLL) on mobility, employability, and interculturality using Linkedln data in conjunction with document reviews and a small sample of staff interviews. MALLL is an internationally-oriented higher education programme within the Erasmus Mundus scheme launched in 2006. Subjects were MALLL graduates between 2008 to 2014 and data were gathered from Work Experience and Education sections of 75 individual LinkedIn profiles as well as organic responses on the group's LinkedIn forum. The results show that the MALLL programme facilitated the graduates' academic and professional mobility in varying degrees. The sample's career profiles show that their roles are in line with MALLL's intended outcomes related to employability. Meanwhile, positive outcomes were perceived by the graduates pertaining to their interculturality. LinkedIn proved to be a potent instrument in evaluating the outcomes of a higher education programme. With a careful consideration of its benefits and risks and by drawing a strategy to harness its potential, programme evaluators can find at their disposal a rich and practical way of assessment in conjunction with more traditional data collection methods.

Keywords LinkedIn · evaluation · mobility · employability · interculturality

Resumen

El objetivo de esta investigación fué realizar una evaluación preliminar de los resultados del European Masters in Lifelong Learning: Policy and Management (MALLL) utilizando datos procedentes de Linkedln, junto con revisiones de documentos y entrevistas a responsables del máster. Los participantes son graduados de las promociones 2008-2014 y los datos se obtuvieron de las secciones *experiencia laboral* y *educación* en 75 perfiles, junto con testimonios extraídos del foro del grupo en LinkedIn. Los resultados muestran que el programa MALLL facilitó la movilidad académica y profesional de los egresados. Los perfiles profesionales manifiestan que sus roles están alineados con los objetivos del máster en términos de empleabilidad. Asimismo, los graduados percibieron resultados positivos relacionados con la interculturalidad. LinkedIn ha mostrado ser un potente instrumento para evaluar los resultados de un programa de Educación Superior. Tras una rigurosa consideración de sus beneficios y riesgos y asegurando un protocolo que garantice sus potencialidades, los evaluadores de programas pueden disponer de una rica y valiosa información, en combinación con la obtenida por métodos más tradicionales de recogida de datos.

Keywords LinkedIn · evaluación · movilidad · empleabilidad · interculturalidad

INTRODUCTION

Programme evaluation has gained traction in the field of public policy in recent decades. In Europe, the demand for greater effectiveness and efficiency in the public sector with the rise of the new public management in the 1980's prompted the need to show the programmes' results and measure their impact (Stern, 2004).

The tendency to evaluate also spilled over to the higher education sector. Because of its potential to address societal challenges such as economic growth and social cohesion (World Bank, 2002), it has garnered interest from key donors and development organisations (Roberts, Day, Jenkins, & Geddes, 2012).

Erasmus Mundus (EM) is one of several higher education programmes funded generously by a supranational entity such as the European Commission. Its goals align with bigger societal challenges, including facilitating the mobility of students in Europe, fostering employability among its students, and promoting intercultural dialogue, among others. These objectives feed into the institutional goals of enhancing the attractiveness of European Higher Education (HE) and the cooperation amongst European Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and the world.

Ten years after its launch and two cycles into its implementation, more than 200 Erasmus Mundus Master's Courses (EMMCs) have been made accessible to students from all over the world through scholarships and self-funding routes. The European Masters in Lifelong Learning: Policy and Management (MALLL) is one of such EM programmes. It is a two-year master course involving three European Union (EU) partner universities: Institute of Education, UK (currently University College London following the official merger in 2014); Aarhus University, Denmark; and University of Deusto, Spain. In August 2010, the University of Melbourne in Australia was included as a third country partner within the MALLL consortium and started receiving students since the academic year 2011-2012 for a summer module at the end of their first year of studies. A large number of scholarships for third country

students have been made available through MALLL, with over 150 students from different continents having accessed and successfully completed the programme.

The large and unprecedented breadth of EM programmes such as MALLL garnered a fair amount of interest among IGOs, governments, academic institutions, and individual graduates as exemplified by a number of commissioned large-scale graduate surveys. The implementation of these studies has provided considerable evidence on the outcomes of the EM programmes on the general population of students. These studies include the EMA Graduate Impact Studies conducted yearly from 2009 to 2015 (EMA, 2009, 2010, 2011; ICUnet.AG, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015; ICUnet, 2017), the Erasmus Impact Study for students and staff (European Commission, 2014), and the study on EM's graduates' employability (Hemmer et al., 2011). Some consortia such as MALLL also implement regular programme-specific feedback sessions and reviews on students' levels of satisfaction.

Although evaluation systems are generally in place, MALLL stakeholders still perceived a need for additional data specifically in regard to the geographical and occupational engagement of MALLL alumni as well as their perceptions on how MALLL contributed to their lives after graduation. Furthermore, current students at that time expressed overwhelming interest in knowing the careers pursued by MALLL alumni to plan their own career paths. This prompted the implementation of a preliminary study on the outcomes of MALLL specifically in relation to the mobility, employability, and interculturality of its alumni.

While surveys and interviews would have been a rich source of data, designing a survey or interview instrument proved to be unfeasible given this preliminary project's time constraints. LinkedIn was then explored as a tool to evaluate the outcomes of the MALLL programme as intended for by its founding institutions – the European Commission (EC) and the MALLL Consortium – using data gained from students' perceptions and their mobility and occupational profiles. It was the first time that a social media-based approach was implemented to analyse MALLL graduates' mobility, employability, and interculturality.

The study only included seven cohorts and is intended to be part of a bigger process to collect data from all its students after the final cohort graduates in the last quarter of 2017. The research's results were projected to benefit the MALLL community as a whole by helping inform students' career decisions and serving as an accountability tool for the institutions involved.

Social Media in Research

Although there is a palpable and unusual social, professional, and academic interest in social networks, there remains a lack and a need for further research on this topic (Cabero, Barroso, Llorente, & Yanes, 2016). The use of social media such as LinkedIn in research is identified as a promising tool in comparison to the more traditional approaches to data collection. Wilson, Gosling, & Graham (2012) contend that online social networks are of interest to social scientists as they reflect current social processes and exhibit the changing way in which information is shared. Indeed, looking at social media provides a rich resource for looking at the viewpoints, feelings, attitudes, and intentions of people as compared to more traditional approaches like surveys and focus groups that involve directive questions (Romand, Donovan, Chen, & Nunamaker, 2003). Because of the nature and scope of information available in social media, many opportunities for conducting qualitative analysis are afforded (Parker, Saundage, & Lee, 2011).

Social science-oriented studies also benefit from raw and unperturbed data in the study of social media spaces (Hoser & Nitschke, 2010). While not completely unbiased, interactions gathered from social media sites are free from possible behavioural adjustments due to the knowledge that they are in fact being observed (ibid.). In the typology offered by Eysenbach & Till (2001), this form of data collection alludes to passive analysis, which lacks the participation of the researcher in any form of interaction with the subjects apart from observing and gathering related content.

Ethical Considerations in Using Social Media as a Research Tool

Given a plethora of advantages as described in the previous sections, social media research also puts forward important ethical considerations. As it holds, the trustworthiness of the data is put into question when analysing its content (Redmond, 2010). In the case of LinkedIn, the fact that it is a professional networking site may lead to some data being purposefully skipped or tweaked to achieve an image that the user wishes to project to potential or current employers and colleagues. According to Guillory & Hancock (2012), LinkedIn can be a platform for possible deception and enhanced self-representation. In the use of LinkedIn profiles to review mobility and employment status of the graduates, the data's trustworthiness is a risk that the study acknowledges, although the richness and longitudinality of the data obtained reflect how the information harvested through this approach could provide answers to the questions posed. They also posit that the fact that LinkedIn information is made public decreases the likelihood of deception as its data is more readily verifiable than a traditional and private resumé with authors being more likely to be discovered (ibid.).

Secondly, social media research brings about issues related to informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality (Eysenbach & Till, 2001). With regard to informed consent, Hoser & Nitschke (2010) contend that data from social media cannot be utilised without consent when it is not intended for research purposes nor when the researcher is not originally part of the assumed audience.

Some authors lay out contexts wherein an informed consent may be waived in implementing passive analysis. In a case study exemplified by Flicker et al. (2004), information harvested from non-consenting subjects were expressed in general and contextual terms by avoiding direct quotations in the analysis. Eysenbach & Till (2001) also describe how the research can progress without obtaining informed consent in circumstances when "the material is anonymised at the earliest possible stage, if there is no inconvenience or hazard to the subjects, and if the institutional review board has reviewed and agreed the research protocol" (p. 1104). They argue that the nature of the data obtained, the manner by which they are presented, and the

vulnerability of the group in question are determining factors in the decision whether or not to seek informed consent.

In the context of the MALLL study, the researchers' involvement in the programme as student and staff led to an ethical dilemma whether or not to solicit informed consent in obtaining LinkedIn data. Ultimately, the researchers opted to waive informed consent because the informational benefits to its audience were projected to outweigh its potential harm. The identities of the respondents are not disclosed and none of the information gathered and compiled for the purposes of this research can be publicly accessed. In addition, the information is stored in a password-protected device and the graduates' mobility patterns and occupational engagement are discussed using broad categories.

Social media and LinkedIn in HE programme evaluation

LinkedIn is a professionally-oriented social networking tool that enables the creation of a profile containing personal information, related work and educational experience, and samples of professional work. It also enables its users to connect with other people, participate in community forums, and subscribe to posts of specific groups.

Some studies have been carried out to map mobility patterns and career paths among graduates using data from social media. Case, Gardiner, Rutner, & Dyer (2011) mapped out the career progression of graduates of an Information Systems university programme through the information published in their LinkedIn profiles. They provided a summary of the typical jobs assumed by the graduates and their transition to higher managerial positions. Indeed, LinkedIn provided a wealth of information to map out career profiles and is considered by Case et al.'s (2011) study to be "a valuable information repository" (p. 45). Similarly, Tantawy, Farouk, Mohamed, & Yousef (2014) utilised LinkedIn to gather data on Egyptian Information and Communication Technology (ICT) graduates and their careers after graduation within and beyond the Egyptian labour market.

METHODOLOGY

This study intends to evaluate the outcomes of MALLL in terms of mobility, employability, and interculturality and explore LinkedIn as a tool for data collection. Data related to alumni's mobility, employability, and interculturality were collected from LinkedIn and were then analysed quantitatively through frequency distributions and qualitatively using the codes developed from document reviews and staff interviews.

Participants

This study utilised convenience sampling by locating MALLL graduates from the first cohort (2008 graduates) to the seventh (2014 graduates) on the LinkedIn platform through the *Members* section of the MALLL Students and Alumni group. The eighth to the tenth cohorts were excluded from the study because they were still involved in the programme at the time the study was implemented. As not all MALLL graduates were members of this group, a manual search was also implemented based on the master student list procured from the MALLL administrators. Both the focused and manual searches garnered 118 results. The following criteria were then applied to these profiles to identify which ones could be used for analysis:

- Has successfully completed and graduated from MALLL at the time the research was implemented
- Has an existing LinkedIn profile
- Has indicated his or her nationality or country of origin anywhere in the profile
- Has indicated which one of the MALLL universities he or she graduated from and, whenever possible, which universities he or she attended during MALLL
- Has declared at least one post either under Experience or Education (see Figure 5 below) after graduation, including their respective dates and locations

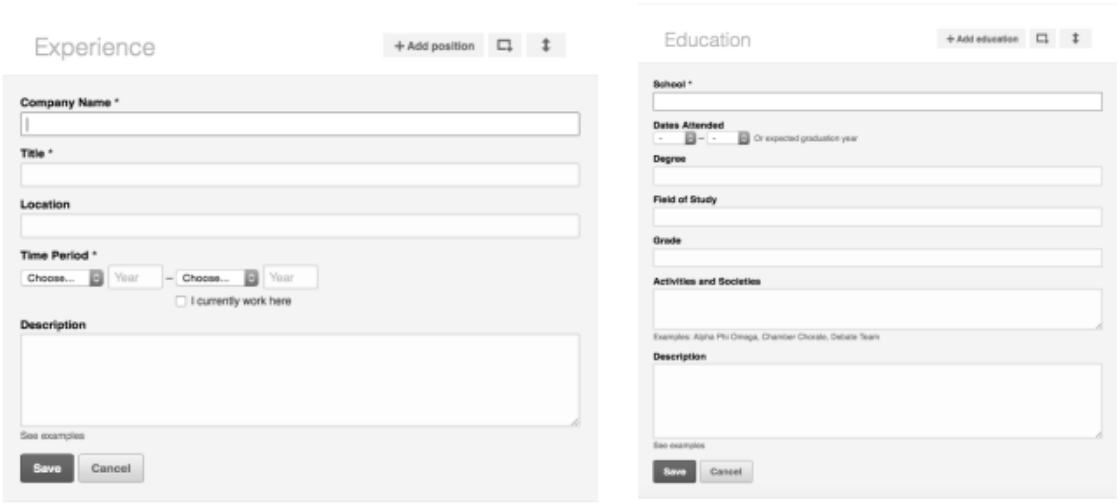

Figure 5. Samples of LinkedIn elements pertaining to work experience and education

A total of 75 profiles matched the criteria and were used for analysis. This number comprises almost half of the total number of MALLL students who graduated from 2008 to 2014 and was deemed sufficient for preliminary inferences to be made.

The largest share of MALLL alumni included in this study are originally from Asia and Europe, with the former representing the highest percentage (44%, n=33) of student intake in this sample. A significant number of Asian graduates hails from India (12%, n=9) and the Philippines (8%, n=6). Meanwhile, the most number of European students come from Serbia (8%, n=6) and Denmark (5.33%, n=4). Other third countries that exhibit high representation among the research's subjects include the United States (6.67%, n=5) and Ethiopia (5.33%, n=4).

At the time the study was conducted, slightly more than half of the alumni were residing in Europe (53.33%, n=40) and a significant number (28%, n=21) were taking residence in Asia (see Figure 6 below).

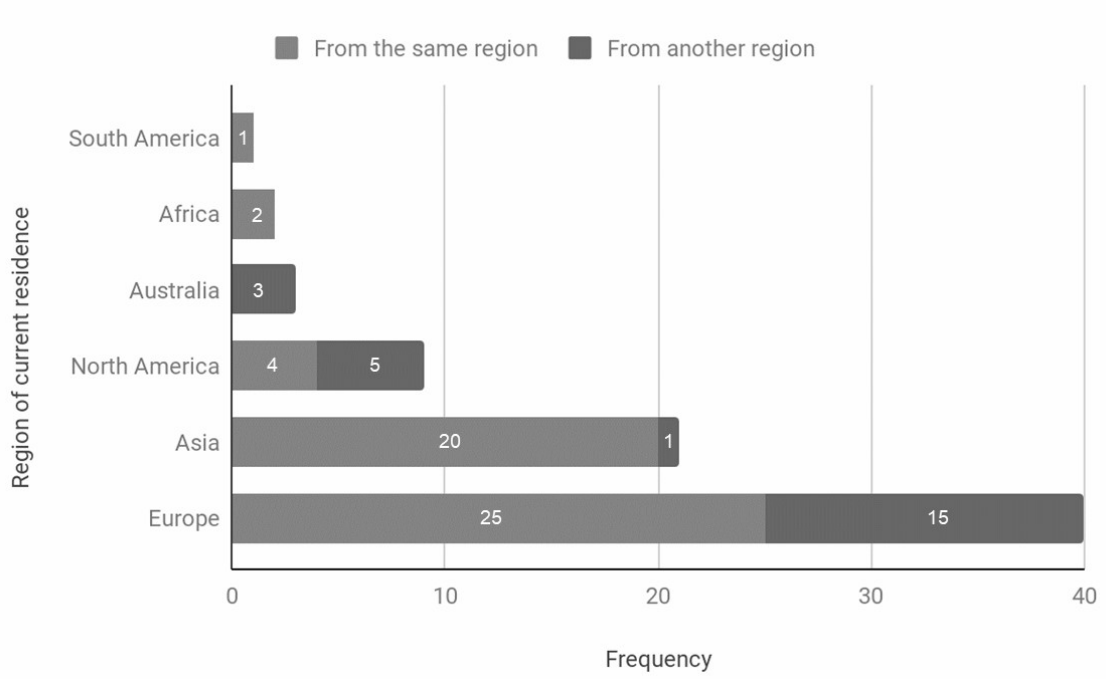

Figure 6. Number of MALLL graduates according to current region of residence (N=75)

Data collection

The following data were pulled from the alumni's LinkedIn profiles to map their geographical locations as a function of mobility:

- Country of origin
- MALLL universities attended and inclusive dates of participation
- Inclusive locations and dates of further studies and/or jobs they held during and after the MALLL programme

Meanwhile, the alumni's declared jobs and roles were used as a measure of employability. They were categorised based on the nature of their roles as well as their associated sectors.

To complement the data drawn from their LinkedIn profiles, the alumni's perceptions pertaining to mobility, employability, and interculturality were gleaned from their responses posted on the group's forum. The forum questions and responses were organically derived and were initiated by the MALLL students themselves.

Two separate discussion threads were found. The first one, posted in June 2010, was entitled "Retrospective look at the MALLL." It had 6 responses to the following questions:

- If you had the MALLL course start all over again, what would you have done differently?
- What were the highlights of the MALLL for you?
- Were your initial expectations met, and why/why not? How did you act to better accomplish your goals?
- If you had to advise an incoming student to the MALLL course on what they should consider doing, what would you tell them?

In the second discussion entitled "Where are you now?" posted in January 2011, the moderator encouraged the members to discuss where they are, what their careers are at that time, and whether their lives have changed after graduation and how. It garnered 11 organic responses.

Data analysis

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were implemented to analyse the LinkedIn data gathered. The number of students from each region, the rates of return to their countries of origin, and the professional roles they have undertaken were represented quantitatively as frequency distributions. Meanwhile, the qualitative analysis required a set of codes to be established pertaining to MALLL's intended outcomes with which the actual outcomes were compared. The codes were gleaned through a review of Erasmus Mundus-related policy documents, existing EM studies, the MALLL programme's website, and promotional brochure content as well as through interviews with two members of the MALLL staff.

Promoting mobility, employability, and interculturality were common objectives for EM and MALLL. More specifically, MALLL's intended mobility-related outcomes include:

- increasing inward and outward streams,
- improving academic mobility during and after graduation, and
- facilitating further European work experience through professional mobility.

In terms of employability, MALLL's intended outcomes are to promote:

- professional relevance in policymaking, educational practice, and educational management,
- increased career opportunities as a result of MALLL participation, and
- development of professional skills and knowledge.

Meanwhile, interculturality included the following indicators:

- sharing of academic traditions,
- facilitation of intercultural dialogue,
- development of intercultural skills, and
- belongingness to a global student network.

These indicators were used to analyse the outcomes of MALLL based on the graduates' locations after graduation, their published work roles, and their responses in the group's forum section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An analysis of the actual work roles, geographical locations, and perceptions of the MALLL graduates based on LinkedIn data sheds light to the actual outcomes of the MALLL programme in relation to the goals set forth by its institutional stakeholders, namely: mobility, employability, and interculturality.

Actual outcomes pertaining to mobility

Analysing the current study and/or work engagement posted by the MALLL alumni on their LinkedIn profiles, slightly more than half of the study's sample is based in Europe (53.33%, n=40). The second most common current residence among the graduates is Asia (28%, n=21), followed by North America (12%, n=9) and Australia (4%, n=3). There is a small share of

graduates currently living in Africa (n=2) and South America (n=1), all of which are returning graduates.

As shown in Figure 2, Europe currently holds the largest share of MALLL graduates' place of residence, 62.50% of which are European graduates themselves. Out of this percentage of European graduates currently residing in Europe, more than three-fifths (n=11) hails from EU countries. Second to Europe, Asia holds a significant share of MALLL graduates' current residence, majority (95.24%, n=20) also being originally from Asia. This tendency to stay either in Europe or Asia among MALLL graduates is argued to be affected by two factors: (1) the high representation of Europe and Asia as regions of origin, and (2) that there is a general pattern of return to one's home country among European and Asian graduates.

Almost two-fifths (n=29) of the total number of MALLL graduates in this sample has also had further work or academic experience in Europe other than the country of origin for a certain period after graduation, as evidenced by their LinkedIn profile entries under *Experience* and *Education*.

The graduates' first destination after graduation is a good indicator of the nature of the lateral mobility of MALLL graduates in relation to the intended outcome of gaining further experience in Europe. Based on their LinkedIn profiles, the first work or study activity after graduation was mapped. It was found that among the population of MALLL graduates who showed lateral mobility within Europe after graduation, majority of them (75.86%, n=22) listed a host country (Denmark, UK, or Spain) as the first country where further professional and academic experience was realised. This was an important indicator that shows how the MALLL programme can be a gateway for students to acquire further work or academic experience in Europe.

Meanwhile, the outgoing professional mobility of MALLL graduates from the EU was also analysed based on their published destinations right after graduation. Only a tenth (n=2)

showed professional activity in a third country (Asia and North America) after graduation, while more than half (n=16) have returned to their countries of origin.

On the whole, lateral mobility among MALLL graduates in this sample is maintained at around a third of the sample in students both from within and outside EU, with a general pattern of return to the country of origin. The programme appears to contribute in promoting both academic and professional mobility after graduation in the MALLL host countries among non-EU graduates. On the other hand, outgoing mobility for EU students in this sample are intra-European and short-term in nature, with limited evidence of post-graduation professional mobility.

Actual outcomes pertaining to employability

MALLL's founders have envisioned its graduates to work as professionals in the field of lifelong learning (LLL) 'to confront the challenges of educational policymaking, practice and administration in the 21st century' (MALLL brochure). As one of the MALLL founders described, the programme intends to train professionals to be educators, policy analysts and advisers, and LLL programme managers.

An analysis of the graduates' LinkedIn profiles shows that the MALLL graduates are involved in various roles. The most common roles assumed by MALLL graduates in this sample with regard to current job positions are summarised in Figure 7.

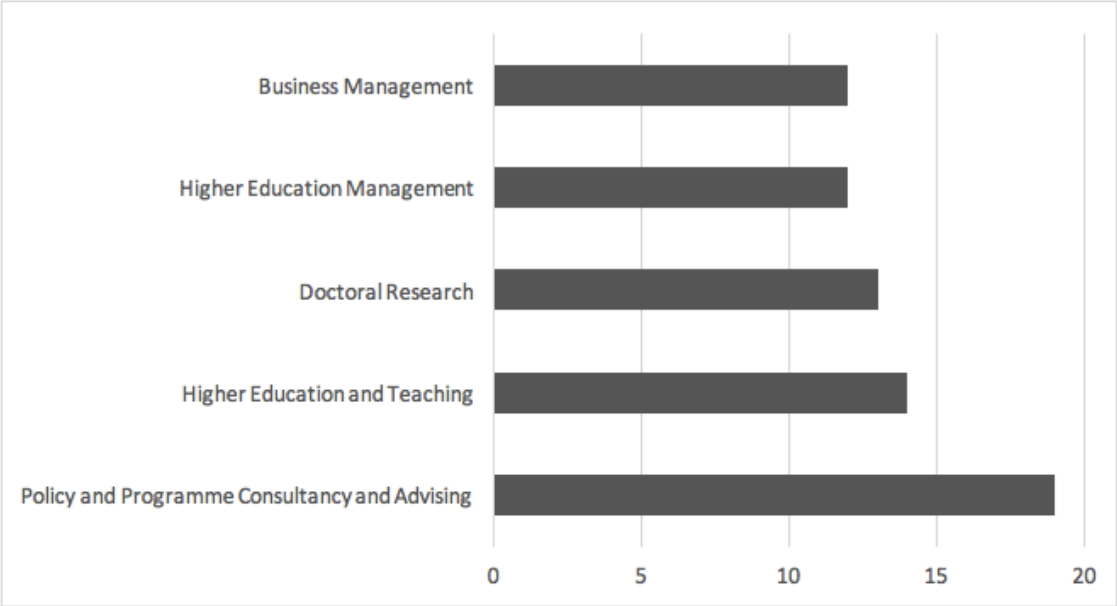

Figure 7. Most common careers among MALLL graduates (N=75) according to current job positions

The top specific roles assumed by the MALLL graduates considered in this study are parallel to the three main areas of MALLL focus: educational programme and policymaking and implementation (n=19), professional practice in education (HE teaching, n=14), and educational administration (HE management, n=12). MALLL graduates also appear to be highly involved in research tasks (n=21), 13 of which are currently doctorate students. Alongside preparing professionals for policymaking and practice in LLL, its graduates are showing a tendency towards further studies and research. Subsequent data garnered from in-depth interviews with two staff and two students show that the decision to continue with doctorate studies among MALLL graduates may be attributed to a number of factors, specifically:

- the high standards in student recruitment that enables the entry of competent students with high capacities for critical analysis,
- the programme's focus on critical thinking that is compatible with the rigorous process of research, and

- the development of career aspirations to more deeply engage in research because of their experiences in MALLL.

The data garnered from the LinkedIn profiles were complemented by graduates' LinkedIn forum responses, especially in identifying the skills they deem to have acquired through MALLL. Graduates described improvements in those pertaining to higher thinking, management, research, and academic writing. These findings are deemed aligned with MALLL's intended outcomes, as the programme is meant to prepare students for work in lifelong learning policy and practice through establishment of a strong research base and a knowledge of lifelong learning policies. While some graduates are not directly involved in the educational field, they still appeared to value their MALLL learnings especially those related to management and research skills.

Although MALLL's contribution to its graduates' skills was positively rated by the respondents, LinkedIn forum answers reveal varying perceptions on the relevance of MALLL relevance to their current job posts. Out of five graduates who mentioned how MALLL relates to their current professions, three expressed uncertainty in how the learnings from MALLL were relevant to their careers.

It is important to note, however, of the temporality of the LinkedIn forum content in that they were expressed immediately after graduation at a time of transition back to work. The responses also show that the perceived lack of relevance of MALLL to some in relation to their current occupational engagement was contingent on the mismatch between personal (career aspirations, at a stage of transition and uncertainty at the time the response was given) and institutional circumstances (available jobs in the labour market).

Actual outcomes pertaining to interculturality

Promoting interculturality is one of MALLL's main objectives, which includes sharing of academic traditions, facilitating intercultural dialogue, promoting intercultural skills, and contributing to the graduates' sense of belongingness to a global student network.

Out of the 11 respondents in the forum, 7 (63.64%) reported that they have expanded their network, more so through international connections, as a result of their participation in the MALLL programme. They often refer to having had gained friends around the world as a valuable aspect of MALLL.

Aside from an expansion of one's network, a significant number of students also declared how the programme facilitated intercultural dialogue and how this affected both their professional and personal lives (n=5, 45.45%). With regard to the former, this included getting introduced to novel ideas within the realm of education. The latter, meanwhile, referred to gaining a greater knowledge of the local lifestyle and an increase in self-reflection as a result of exposure to different cultures and lifestyles.

Two graduates also described how the MALLL programme exposed them to academic traditions distinct from their own, leading to a greater understanding of its repercussions in their own academic experience. In terms of acquiring intercultural skills, one graduate reported an improvement in her language skills of the host country and the other one in his attitude when dealing with other people personally and professionally.

Conclusion

The results show that the MALLL programme generally facilitated the graduates' academic and professional mobility, although further mobility after graduation was higher for non-EU graduates. It was also found that while the transition period to work was marked by uncertainty, the sample's career trajectories post-graduation are aligned with the job roles foreseen and intended by the MALLL founders for its alumni. Pursuing doctorate studies also appeared to be a popular option among the graduates alongside assuming roles in teaching, consultancy, and management. They also express a generally positive evaluation of MALLL's contribution towards their intercultural experience and understanding, reporting an expansion of their personal and professional network through their MALLL participation.

The LinkedIn platform has indeed been a valuable source of data in evaluating the actual outcomes of the MALLL programme in conjunction with more traditional approaches such as document review and in-depth interviews. This study has shown that the fit between the research questions, the data available in social media, and the project's practical considerations made LinkedIn a viable source for data collection. Although it might not be appropriate for some researches due to the nature of the information they wish to gather, LinkedIn's profile feature proved a good fit for this research with regard to the information needed by the MALLL stakeholders, which included the MALLL graduates' mobility destinations and occupational engagements after graduation. The graduates' forum responses, while far from exhaustive, also provided insight on how MALLL's contributions were perceived by the students. Indeed, all these data will be beneficial both to the programme's founders as an accountability tool and to its graduates for their own career planning.

Aside from the goodness of fit between the research questions and the data available from MALLL's LinkedIn group, this research sheds light to other equally important considerations when deciding to use social media platforms such as LinkedIn in evaluation of HE programmes. Firstly, the huge capacity of social media to provide retrospective data raises concerns about whether or not sufficient time has elapsed for an evaluation to be implemented. In this study, the timing of the students' responses in the forum coincided with the period immediately after graduation. This period of transition could have led to their feelings of uncertainty towards MALLL's relevance to their careers and was factored into the analysis. Future studies should group the responses based on the year they graduated and analyse the data collected separately.

Secondly, the availability of data may vary for different groups and can consequently affect the extent to which the evaluation may be implemented. Albeit limited, this research was able to gather data from LinkedIn's forum feature because of the relevance of the questions that were organically posted by the MALLL students. It is recommended that HE institutions think prospectively regarding the evaluation of their programmes' outcomes based on students'

perceptions, create a social media strategy, and leverage professionally-oriented platforms like LinkedIn through engaging and targeted posts and questions.

Thirdly, the relatively small sample size of the case study also made manual search and data input feasible. Larger samples would make this kind of approach impractical and would then require automated methods both for data collection from the LinkedIn profiles and the forum content.

Lastly, ethical concerns are of utmost importance when gathering data for programme evaluation. Several considerations relevant to social media research include distinguishing the appropriateness of the tool based on the respondents' level of online engagement, determining its advantages and dangers, deciding when and how to request informed consent, and protecting the privacy and anonymity of the parties involved.

As a whole, this study has shown how LinkedIn can be used in the field of HE programme evaluation. With a careful consideration of its benefits and risks and by drawing a strategy to harness its potential, evaluators can find at their disposal a rich and practical way of assessing programme outcomes in conjunction with more traditional data collection methods.

The preliminary results from this study have been communicated to MALLL students and stakeholders during the most recent MALLL annual seminar in November 2016 and will likewise be presented in an international conference in 2017. Using these preliminary findings as basis, an extension of the study is currently being undertaken by the researchers as part of a doctoral thesis wherein data will be collected from all the student cohorts of MALLL using secondary data, email questionnaires, analysis of LinkedIn and Facebook data, and in-depth interviews. The doctoral project will also take the research a step further by adding a theory-based analysis of the contributions of an internationally oriented HE programme such as MALLL to the global transformation of its students.

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Revisiting the Belmont Report's ethical principles in internet-mediated research: perspectives from disciplinary associations in the social sciences

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to illuminate the conceptualisations and applications of the Belmont Report's key ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice based on a document analysis of five of the most relevant disciplinary guidelines on internet research in the social sciences. These seminal documents are meant to provide discipline-specific guidance for research design and implementation and are regarded as key references when conducting research online. Our analysis revealed that the principles of respect and beneficence were explicitly conveyed in the documents analysed, offering nuanced interpretations on issues of informed consent, privacy, and benefits and risks as well as providing recommendations for modifying traditional practices to fit the online setting. However, the invocations of the principle of justice were rather implicit and reflect an important shift from the Belmont Report's protectionist ethical position towards more situational and dialogic approaches. With the rapidly evolving nature of internet technologies, this analysis is projected to contribute to the ongoing developments in research ethics in the social sciences by outlining the tensions and implications of the use of the internet as a methodological tool. We also seek to provide recommendations on how disciplinary associations can proceed to facilitate ethically sensitive internet research.

Keywords Internet research ethics · Online research ethics · Digital research ethics · Ethics guidelines for internet research · Belmont Report

Introduction

The internet has been converted into what Castells (2001) describes as the fabric of our lives, revolutionizing the way people's perceptions and interactions with their environment are reflected. In the field of social science research, it is viewed by many as a rapidly developing and massively potent methodological tool due to its role in shaping the dynamics, locations, and embodiments of interactions and meaning construction (Jones 2011; Orton-Johnson 2010;

Parker et al. 2011; Savage and Burrows 2007; Townsend and Wallace 2016; Wilson et al. 2012). However, the internet's use in social science research is fraught with ethical and legal challenges, some of which appear to be more complex than what traditional research ethics can address. The multi-paradigmatic and fluid nature of the social sciences prompts it to remain adaptable to its changing object of inquiry, our society, which now involves the internet (Hine 2005). As Buchanan (2011) contends, the changes in spaces and technology afforded by the internet "has the potential to fundamentally disturb the extant models of human subjects research" (p. 83), paving the way for the creation of what she coins research ethics 2.0. Moreover, the implementation of research in online as opposed to face-to-face contexts raises several issues that warrant new models and approaches. Jones (2011) points out how the development of Web 2.0 platforms, including social media, has expanded possibilities for participation as well as ethical issues and dilemmas.

These developments and the concomitant ethical concerns they raise seem to be recognised by those involved in both academic and market research. As a result, scholars, university institutional review boards (IRBs), human research ethics committees (HRECs), research councils, and a variety of other public and private organisations have released guidelines pertaining to the ethical use of the internet. While there is a wealth of literature pertaining to internet research in general, there are still gaps to be filled. Firstly, the continuous advancement of technologies and the wider variety of data that can be harvested online require guidelines to be regularly revised to reflect the latest issues and debates that arise from this ever-changing field. Secondly, the applications of internet research ethics are discipline specific (Buchanan and Zimmer 2018) and will thus need to consider the different applications between fields. This article focuses on internet research ethics in the social sciences and aims to illuminate the applications and implications of ethical guidelines for the benefit of individuals who identify their research practice within this discipline.

Disciplinary associations, or learned societies, are one of the key entities in guiding researchers in the conduct of ethically sensitive studies. According to Beauchamp and Childress (1994),

professional codes of conduct can play a significant role in reinforcing member identification and in upholding professional values. Within the realm of a specific discipline, they are particularly helpful when deciding on the study design and reflecting on the discipline-specific dilemmas that arise in the choice of methods. In the same vein, Platt (2015) describes how disciplinary associations have been an important source of new knowledge and ethical codes for the practice of professions, ultimately contributing to legitimizing the profession's knowledge claims, activities, and standards as well as the cooperation between its members, among others.

Identifying disciplinary associations' stance on ethical issues arising from the use of the internet as a methodological tool is thus deemed worthwhile, especially in social science research where boundaries are often loose. This paper aims to contribute to the growing literature on internet research by identifying the conceptualisations and applications of traditional ethical principles in the current disciplinary guidelines on internet-mediated research. Ultimately, our goal is to advance the interpretation and reinterpretation of ethical concepts when implementing studies online involving human participants. We begin this venture by clarifying the scope of internet-mediated research in the following section and discussing how the rise of the internet has provided challenges in the dominant understanding of the ethical principles of research.

Types of internet-mediated research

Nowadays, the internet serves as a tool for researchers to carry out a wide range of methods alongside its role as a subject of inquiry itself (Jones 2011; Markham and Buchanan 2012; Orton-Johnson 2010). This article focuses on the role of the internet as a medium and not as a subject for research, hence the term internet-mediated research. It refers to activities such as online surveys, web page content analysis, videoconferencing, e-conversations through social media sites, email, chatrooms, and discussion boards and/or blogs (Convery and Cox 2012). To further distinguish its varied forms, Hewson et al. (2003) categorise the internet's myriad of methodological functions as either primary or secondary internet research. The former

includes online recruitment and data collection from human subjects while the latter involves the use of non-human resources such as digital books and journals. Traditionally, conducting primary internet research undergoes more stringent ethical procedures. According to Eysenbach and Till (2001), primary internet research may be grouped into three categories, namely passive analysis, active analysis, or a mix of these approaches. The difference among these categories lies in the subjects' knowledge that they are being studied and the researcher's level of participation in communications.

Active analysis refers to a generally participative approach in internet research that reveals the identity of the researcher and allows his or her participation in data creation. Meanwhile, passive analysis alludes to Lee's (2000) definition of unobtrusive methods and Roberts's (2015) covert research wherein researchers act as observers without direct interaction with the data's creator or source and participants are unaware that they are being observed for research purposes. These include social network analysis, hyperlink analysis, and analysis of "found" data (Hine 2011). This method also includes big data or blog mining and web scraping implemented in social media-based market research (ESOMAR and GBRN 2015). Eysenbach and Till (2001) further describe the existence of a mix between passive and active analyses wherein the researcher's identity is made known while his or her role is confined to a participant recruiter and data collector rather than a data contributor.

Ethical human subjects research and internet technologies

Regardless of the study's location in aforementioned categories, an important distinction is made between the use of the internet with documents (archival research) and people (human subject research) (Walther 2002). Historically, the concern for ethical research involving human subjects was a response to a series of human rights violations following the Second World War and the United States' Tuskegee Experiments, leading to the development of the earliest code of ethics embodied in the Nuremberg Code of 1947. This further led to the development of other seminal texts such as the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights

in 1948, the Declaration of Helsinki in 1964, and the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioural Research's (hereon referred to as National Commission) Belmont Report in 1979 (Markham and Buchanan 2015; Buchanan 2011; Eynon et al. 2008). The Belmont Report has since served as a key reference in evaluating the ethical sensitivity of studies involving human participants. Specifically, the Belmont Report recommends that informed consent be sought, that benefits and risks be evaluated, and the selection, representation, and the burden of participation be fair and equitable. The negative effects of the lack of these principles' application would translate to coercion, harm, and undue involvement of vulnerable and burdened subjects.

Several authors argue that its biomedical roots are being extended and applied to unfit contexts (Beauchamp and Childress 1994; Gunsalus et al. 2006) including social and behavioural research (Siebert et al. 2002). This "mission creep" is seen to be problematic when applied to non-biomedical contexts because of the differences in the nature of inquiry and the methods employed (Gunsalus et al. 2006). Vilar Martín (2013) argues that the socio-educational fields should adapt the bioethical proposal of the Belmont Report in the context of social research. Nonetheless, the Belmont Report retains its authoritative status in ethical decision-making where its principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice are regarded by several authors as the cornerstone of ethical decision-making with human actors (Markham and Buchanan 2012; Armstrong 2003; Buchanan 2011). Ongoing discussions on research ethics use these principles to gauge ethical sensitivity, making them a good point of departure for exploring research practices when using the internet.

When the internet came into the picture and was utilised by researchers as a methodological tool, the existing model for ethics on human subjects research was further challenged. The Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) (Markham and Buchanan 2012), together with Buchanan (2011) and Bassett and O'Riordan (2002), render the continuing use of the term human subjects inadequate when thinking about the internet and the social behaviours that it shapes and facilitates. While there are numerous configurations of what constitutes human

subjects research, it is most commonly identified in regulatory contexts as involving the interaction with individuals and the use and archive of personally identifiable data (Frankel and Siang 1999; Moreno et al. 2013). However, Bassett and O'Riordan (2002) also suggest a more nuanced application of the human subject ethics model to internet research in light of its textual, language-focused, and sometimes detached nature from its creator that challenge the more widespread notion of the internet as merely a spatial venue with online information acting as mere extensions and representations of the individuals' selves. The British Sociological Association's (BSA) document further quotes Kozinets (2015) who argues that "the Internet is actually textlike and spacelike [and] these qualities exist both separately and simultaneously" (2015, p. 135).

While we do not wish to neglect the equally valid contention of the textual, and ergo distinct treatment, owed to information found online, our decision to apply the Belmont Report's principles of respect, beneficence, and justice stems from our acceptance of the looser definition of human subjects research, wherein the use and archive of personal information found online is regarded to be subject to ethical scrutiny. Through this article, we aim to illuminate how the Belmont Report's ethical principles were interpreted and applied in light of five disciplinary associations' guidelines on internet-mediated research as well as identify areas for their further development in future versions.

Methods

Ethics pertaining to human subjects is wide in scope and is subject to overarching human rights principles. Professional boards, research institutions, and even universities have developed and adapted a set of codes and guidelines for their unique needs and objectives. Many scholars, through books and journal articles, have also intended to unbox the complexities of ethical decision-making when using the internet both as a space and a tool for research in a wide range of disciplines. The vast quantity of content dedicated to ethical concepts, meanings, and dilemmas is a testament to the significance of this complex and ever-evolving field.

Inclusion/exclusion criteria

While there is a wealth of academic journals and books devoted to the subject of internet research, there is not as much coverage on grey literature that we argue to be equally as valuable when considering ethical research decisions. According to Auger (1998), this term broadly refers to non-commercially published materials, examples of which include reports, technical notes and specifications, conference proceedings, and supplementary publications, among others. The disciplinary guidelines included in our analysis fall under this category. Because of the fast-paced evolution of internet technologies and the adaptation required from the equally fluid field of the social sciences, we find that these sources are helpful in developing ethical decision-making in internet research. As Orton (2013) further contends, using these materials adds value to practice by providing free, accessible, and up-to-date content without the time and word count limits often involved in indexed and commercially published academic sources.

As the disciplinary guidelines we seek to analyse are not indexed in academic databases, a more general approach was employed. We used a combination of key terms "internet research," "ethics," "guidelines," and "associations" to conduct a wide search on the Google platform. This garnered approximately 10 million hits, which shows the interest in and relevance of the topic in current times. We narrowed down our search to the top 100 results, applying content, design, and quality criteria elaborated by Barry (1994), Savolainen and Kari (2006), and Xie et al. (2010).

Applying the content criterion, we only included documents that specifically discussed internet research ethics guidelines released by associations in non-commercial social sciences and those that mention internet, digital, or online research in the document title. We excluded entries that cover more general codes of professional research ethics that fall beyond the scope of this article as well as the otherwise insightful market research focused ethical guidelines such as those released by the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research (ESOMAR) in cooperation with the Global Research Business Network (GBRN) and the Council of American

Survey Research Organisations (CASRO). Applying the design-related criterion, we only included document guidelines in report format, thus excluding relevant content in web page format. This process narrowed down our list to nine documents.

Applying the quality criterion, we further evaluated the documents based on the documents' currency and consensus. With regard to the former, we only included the latest version of internet research guidelines released by accredited associations from 2005 onwards. As Jones (2011) contends, the rapid evolution of the internet limits the understanding, and thus the content, of the documents released by associations to provide ethical guidance. For example, guidelines released before 2005 will not reflect the ethical issues in the use of social networking sites such as Facebook (ibid.). As a result of this process, only five out of the nine documents initially considered were included in the analysis, enumerated here from the latest date of publication: Ethics Guidelines for Internet-Mediated Research by the British Psychological Society (BPS) in 2017, Ethics Guidelines and Collated Resources for Digital Research by the British Sociological Association (BSA) in 2017, Ethical Guidelines for Internet Research by the National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH) in 2014, Ethical Decision-Making and Internet Research by the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) (Markham and Buchanan 2012), and Ethical Issues in Online Research by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (Jones 2011). Applying the second quality criterion of consensus, we further confirmed the scientific impact of these five documents in the field of internet research ethics as they were frequently cited in the grey literature and academic sources we reviewed.

Methods of analysis

The documents were uploaded to the computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) Atlas.ti for coding. As a first step, we agreed on a set of preliminary codes based on the three main principles of the Belmont Report and implemented a general keyword search on the document guidelines to check for the existence of sections that explicitly refer to these

concepts. From this initial code set, all the co-authors then separately carried out an initial coding of a single document, the results of which were jointly discussed to detect the similarities and differences between our findings, the codes that emerged, and the strategy for their application in the next round of coding. We also drew on existing academic literature to substantiate the emergent codes that were not gleaned from the Belmont Report's invocations of each principle. After a consensus was reached, the first author implemented the second cycle of coding for the remaining guidelines. The most salient themes were then organised into categories and sub-categories and rearranged as the analysis progressed using theoretical coding (Saldaña 2009).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Following our analysis, we found that the guidelines analysed explicitly reflect the principles of respect for persons through informed consent and protection of vulnerable groups and beneficence through a balanced assessment of risks and harm as understood in the Belmont Report. On the other hand, the concept and applications of justice were rather implicit and showed a bigger shift from the original Report. These differences are summarised in Fig. 8 and will be discussed in more detail in the following sub-sections.

General definitions and scope of internet research

Out of the five guidelines analysed, only the BPS document reflects a definitive description of the activities and tools that can be categorised as internet research. BPS describes how internet-mediated research can involve data acquisition in the absence of face-to-face co-presence. This data can be quantitative (surveys and experiments) or qualitative (narratives) as well as reactive (participants interact with the materials such as online surveys and interviews) or nonreactive data (unobtrusively obtained data such as compilation of digital traces, hits, and analyses of found text). While lacking of an explicit definition of the activities involved in internet research,

the AoIR, BERA, and NESH documents mention the role of internet both as a subject of research and a tool that spans from data collection to analysis and storage.

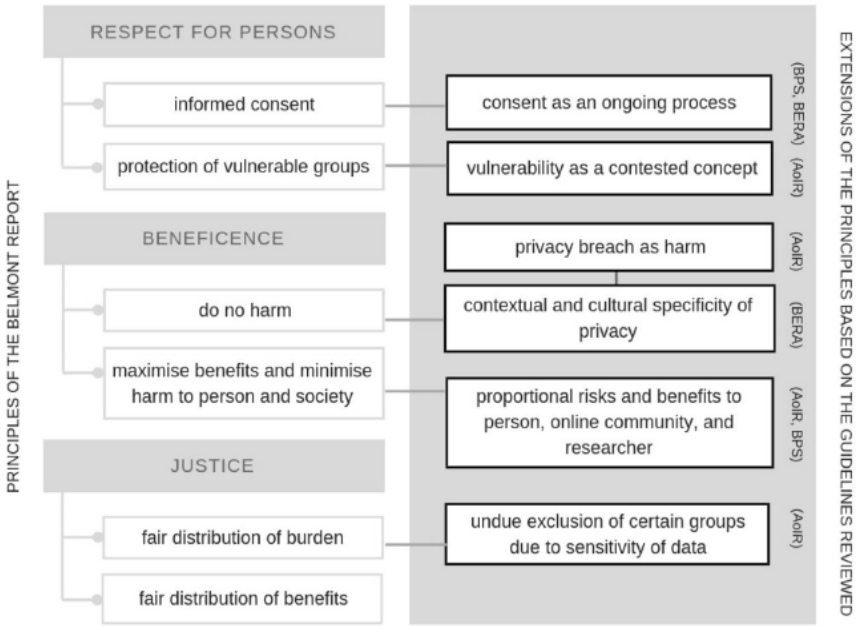

Figure 8. Extensions of the Belmont Report's principles based on the guidelines reviewed

Respect for persons

The Belmont Report defines respect as the acknowledgment of participants' autonomous participation and the need to protect those with diminished autonomy through the conduct of informed consent. Following the analysis of the document guidelines on internet research, we have found that this is the most explicit principle reflected in the guidelines in terms of the applications and modifications in securing informed consent and protecting vulnerable groups, summarised in Fig. 9. We will now turn to a more detailed discussion of the conceptualisations and practical applications of this first principle in the guidelines analysed.

Informed consent

The voluntariness of participation in ethically sensitive research is achieved by making the respondents fully aware of relevant information regarding the research, its objectives, the methods that will be adopted, and its potential risks and benefits. Seeking informed consent

has been the most common way of ensuring that the ethical principle of voluntariness is practiced.

In traditional research concerning human subjects, consent is usually sought by having a respondent sign a document that outlines all relevant information including the risks and benefits implied. However, the current guidelines bring to light some new dilemmas and issues in seeking consent in online settings. Indeed, seeking written informed consent typical of traditional face-to-face research may require modifications when implemented online for a number of practical reasons. BSA provides a comprehensive summary of scenarios that are exempt from informed consent and confidentiality, quoting different sources. We suggest consulting the original document for a more detailed list. Meanwhile, Table 7 provides a synthesis of some scenarios wherein informed consent may be challenging to obtain or may actually be waived as identified in the five documents analysed: AoIR, BERA, BPS, BSA, and NESH.

Firstly, the volume of content and individual members in big online forums makes approaching each individual participant both impractical and time-consuming. As BERA suggests, the online and mediated nature of the process makes it more difficult for researchers to explain and for the participant to understand what he or she is consenting to. Informed consent may also be difficult, and sometimes even impossible, to gather from forum respondents whose contact details cannot be accessed (Jones 2011). Hoser and Nitschke (2010) regard this difficulty as a barrier for implementing this privacy measure, thus making the issue of informed consent more challenging in online settings.

Secondly, the wider variety and increased access to digital tools to researchers make unobtrusive data collection methods more accepted in academic research beyond its more common use in digital marketing. Unobtrusive methods such as data mining and undisclosed observation of online groups gather found and already existing data (Lee 2000) without disclosing the researcher's identity and without his or her involvement in communications

(Eysenbach and Till 2001). In the same manner, the emerging field of learning analytics is subject to the same ethical dilemmas (Jones 2011).

Table 7. When and how to waive or delay informed consent based on disciplinary associations' guidelines

General approaches	
Greater expectation of privacy (e.g. member-only access) raises the concern for informed consent (NESH 2014) Ensure that study's scientific and social value outweighs its risks (BPS 2017) Treat consent as an ongoing process (AoIR 2012; BSA 2017)	
Specific scenarios and suggested approaches	
Scenario 1: when participants' limited knowledge about the study improves its validity (BPS 2017) or reduces harm (NESH 2014)	Request consent to use the data after the study's implementation (BERA/Jones 2011) Ensure that withdrawal and debriefing measures are in place (BPS 2017)
Scenario 2: when informed consent cannot reasonably be sought or obtained during a research project (BERA/Jones 2011; AoIR 2012)	Informed consent is sought at the time of reporting while allowing the research participant to decide how the results will be reported (BERA/Jones 2011; AoIR 2012)
Scenario 3: when getting informed consent through traditional means becomes difficult or time-consuming (BERA/Jones 2011)	Adapt the consent form by using digital signatures, consent tokens, and click boxes (AoIR 2012) Indicate that survey completion grants the participant's consent (BPS 2017)
Scenario 4: when community membership configurations make the source of consent problematic (BPS 2017; NESH 2014)	Approach community moderators to determine how and where to get the consent (BPS 2017) Check for copyright, as some contexts and domains may be protected by copyright law (BPS 2017)
Scenario 5: when people should be credited as authors (BSA 2017)	Treat opinions published by private individuals on the Internet as you would in traditional print media (Bassett and O'Riordan 2002 in BSA 2017) Check Creative Commons guidelines (BSA 2017) Inform authors if a link is made to the page (BPS 2017)

The wider possibilities for data collection and the changing membership configurations in online communities make seeking informed consent less straightforward. Indeed, the propagation of both publicly accessible and membership-only online forums raises the question of whether consent should be sought from the individual, the community, or both. In light of these changes, BPS suggests the role of community moderators and list owners when deciding on seeking the consent of a group, reaching out to them whenever possible to inquire about how to approach the informed consent process especially when it remains unclear

whether the data involved is public or not. In relation to the textual nature of internet data, BPS, BSA, and AoIR also advise researchers to be aware of legal and copyright issues and to consider gaining permission from the page author or web hosting company when linking to publicly available personal websites and social network content as well as when using screenshots or images taken from the web. BSA points out the usefulness of being acquainted with the specifications of licenses such as Creative Commons when dealing with data online, although approaching the author or owner of the text works best to avoid harm. Strictly speaking, copyrighted content is not considered public domain.

While the BPS and NESH contend that informed consent should be strived for whenever possible, they also acknowledge that it may be waived in unique circumstances. BPS states that this can happen when there is reason to believe that there is no expectation of privacy among the group being studied or when the study's scientific and social value justifies undisclosed observation. NESH also asserts that researchers must be sensitive to the 'integrity of context' especially that not all online users are aware that their private posts can be publicly accessible. One practical application of this is when accessing private groups. In this case, NESH declares that there is a higher expectation of privacy and, consequently, raises the concern for seeking valid consent and ensuring the anonymity of those involved.

Thirdly, informed consent in online settings may not always come in paper form. There are acceptable modifications suggested by AoIR, such as using digital signatures, virtual consent tokens, and click boxes. BPS also suggests that the completion of an online questionnaire can serve as an indication of consent, although the use of check boxes is always a good measure. It likewise recommends that consent through non-traditional means be simple enough to encourage the respondent to actually read its contents. A succinct presentation of the consent form in online settings is especially important to ensure that participants are thoroughly informed of the risks and benefits of the study and are not just randomly ticking boxes.

Lastly, researchers also have to be aware that opting to waive informed consent at the beginning of a study may actually be the most ethical approach in some cases, especially "when you want to present a specific case study or quote an individual or focus on a particular element" (Buchanan et al. 2010) or when withholding information (and thus informed consent) maintains the validity of the study (BPS). In such cases, BERA suggests that an ethical approach might be "to obtain informed consent when the project is at the point of reporting and the research subject can decide what is acceptable in relation to the way the research is to be reported" (n.p.), akin to what Roberts (2015) calls retrospective consent. According to BPS, the researcher should also put mechanisms in place to allow participants to be debriefed in the case of withdrawal from the study.

As suggested by the latest disciplinary associations' guidelines, ethically sensitive research conducted on the internet is an ongoing process. This is particularly true when seeking informed consent from participants wherein perceptions and expectations of privacy can change across groups and time. The disciplinary associations' guidelines reflected in this article argue for genuinely informed and valid consent that is not exclusively anchored in the traditional practice of signing a form. As Schneier (2000) and Orton-Johnson (2010) suggest, treating consent as a process rather than a product entails that we treat it not merely as a signed piece of paper. This can be achieved by the researcher making himself or herself available to the participant if any doubt regarding the research process arises (Whitehead 2007). As the tools for research expand, so should the ways in which consent can be sought and given.

Voluntary withdrawal in online studies

One of the aspects of the voluntariness of research participation in the Belmont Report is the freedom to withdraw from the study. BPS contends that compared to face-to-face studies, the risks are higher for internet-mediated research as withdrawal may happen without the researcher's knowledge. This consequently makes debriefing impossible and for some data to be collected and stored even after the withdrawal of participation.

As a measure of ethical practice, more specifically when carrying out online surveys, BPS suggests that participants should be made aware of the possibility for withdrawal of participation during and after the study and for deletion of data that has already been partially collected. Making withdrawal procedures clear is also good practice by providing a visible withdraw button that leads to a debrief page and the option to withdraw the partially collected data. In cases where the participant requests withdrawal from the study after it has been completed, also known as retrospective withdrawal, the researcher should be able to honor this taking into account the governing data protection laws. An identification code may be assigned to individual participants at the start of the study to facilitate possible withdrawal in the future, especially when dealing with large data sets.

In online focus groups, withdrawal from data collected through unobtrusive means may prove to be challenging. BPS describes how this type of data collection may include the withdrawing participant's identifiable information in the responses provided by other non-withdrawing participants and should thus be considered by researchers when storing and documenting data.

THE CONTESTED NOTION OF VULNERABILITY

Protecting vulnerable groups is both an application of the principle of autonomy and beneficence, acting both as a gesture of respect for human dignity (Jones 2011) and a measure to minimise harm (BPS). AoIR, BERA, and BPS identify, albeit only in broad terms, which groups are deemed vulnerable in online settings. A point of convergence, however, is in the documents' declarations in the treatment of children and minors as vulnerable and in the need to seek parental or guardian consent. Both AoIR and BERA suggest that the principle of proportionality be applied, in that researching more vulnerable groups requires more care on the part of the researcher to protect them from harm. Conversely, AoIR contends that predicting which groups are vulnerable and the harm that may be induced as a result of the study is achallenging task. As a result, they propose a reflexive and negotiated approach to this principle by clarifying the various notions of vulnerability and harm in context.

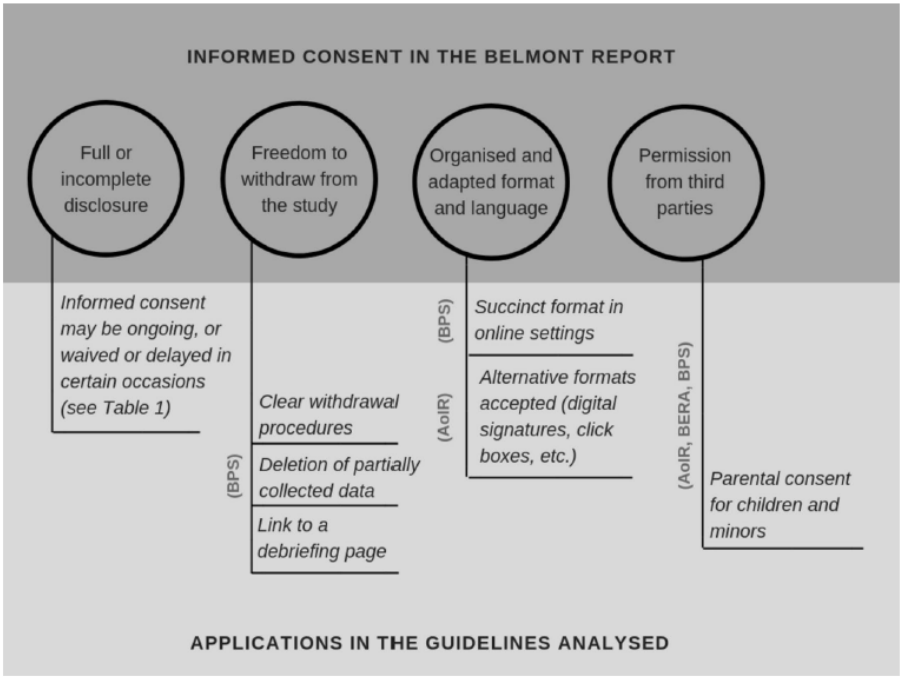

Figure 9. Comparison of the application of the respect for persons principle as a function of informed consent between the Belmont Report and the guidelines analysed

Beneficence

The Belmont Report states that an ethical approach to research involves the principle of beneficience, wherein the researcher seeks to minimise harm and maximise benefits for human subjects by conducting a risk–benefit assessment. This principle remains salient in the guidelines analysed, with AoIR regarding ethical decision-making as a balancing act wherein decisions such as waiving informed consent and using deception are made through a careful and proportional consideration of their benefits and risks. The notion of risk reflected in the Belmont Report basically alluded to psychological or physical pain or injury, although it likewise acknowledges legal, social, and economic harm that might result from one's participation in research.

While several scholars contend that the online settings usually involve minimal risk (Kraut et al. 2004), others argue that and both online and offline settings require just equals amounts of sensitivity (Eynon et al. 2008). However, the guidelines analysed revealed some nuances in the ethical conduct of internet research in relation to the observance of the principle of beneficence,

summarised in Fig. 10. As Buchanan (2011) suggests, the very existence of internet-specific guidelines conveys that there are new challenges arising from the emergence of this new research space and medium. In the subsequent sections, we will discuss specific beneficence-related considerations outlined in the document guidelines analysed.

Privacy breach as harm: contextuality and culture-specificity of expectations of privacy

Following the analysis of the five disciplinary associations' guidelines, it was found that protection of privacy is one of the most salient themes in this principle, thus reinforcing the assertion regarding the distinct nature of online research. Although privacy is not explicitly reflected in the original Belmont Report, it has since become a pressing concern and a source of potential harm that researchers should seek to mitigate. BPS suggests that the risks are greater for privacy breaches that are beyond the researcher's control. This is corroborated by Kraut et al. (2004), describing how online studies generally involve minimal harm but can lead to negative results when data is misused. As Boyd (2010) points out, the greater risk to privacy in online settings is due to the fact that internet-mediated data and tools are persistent, searchable, scalable, and replicable.

As AoIR suggests, harm may manifest not only in physical but also in social, psychological, and economic terms. One of the prevalent ways that psychological and economic harm is induced in online social science studies is when one's reputation is damaged due to a privacy breach (Gaiser 2008; Rasmussen 2008) and leads to the loss of a job. As such, all the guidelines analysed highlight the importance of researchers' awareness of the specificities of the context in which the research is being undertaken and the participants' corresponding expectations of privacy, especially given the global reach and cultural diversity found in internet settings (BPS). AoIR and BSA refer to this as a process-based and dialogic approach to ethics where the public or private nature of data and interaction spaces is subject to ongoing negotiation.

To address and mitigate privacy-related forms of harm, the analysed documents suggest three approaches. First, researchers are advised to keep the participants' data and responses anonymous as well as to ensure that their identities cannot be tracked by using pseudonyms (NESH) and vignettes (BERA), releasing only general or conglomerated data (BERA), and using paraphrased statements (BPS). Secondly, BPS advises researchers to be conscientious of how they store and transfer data, with email correspondence and non-encrypted data storage being more prone to privacy breach. Lastly, while researchers should strive to exhaust all measures to protect the participants' identities, they must also be wary of guaranteeing complete confidentiality when in fact it cannot be assured (BPS) due to the text-based and archiving capacities of internet technologies.

However, the AoIR presents a natural caveat to this: the risk cannot be always assumed in the varied contexts and changing meanings that the internet allows. This is exemplified in Bassett and O'Riordan's (2002) study on an LGBT website, wherein an otherwise marginalised population sought for visibility by publicising sensitive data. Discarding the data altogether because of its sensitive nature can lead to further marginalisation. Indeed, "a rhetoric of 'protection' may result in furthering the unequal power relations of media production by blocking full representation of alternative media" (Bassett and O'Riordan 2002, p. 244). Researchers thus need to be aware that some sources providing sensitive data should not be elided just because the original contributors contact details, and therefore consent, are not readily available.

Risks and benefits for whom? Emerging issues in internet research

Another notable departure from the interpretation of beneficence in the original Belmont Report is the changing conceptions regarding the subjects and recipients of risk when conducting research. In addition to the concern for participants' welfare and the benefits gained by the wider society, the guidelines analysed extend their interpretations of beneficence to online communities and the researchers themselves. The shift of language from society to

communities reflect the underlying premise of trust that characterises many virtual social spaces. NESH also points out that social and cultural movements that function on norms of openness and freedom abound in the online setting, thus making it imperative to consider adopting a sharing mindset when it comes to communicating the outcomes and benefits of research to the participants. The safety and interest of the researcher are likewise considered in the current interpretation of ethical internet research. According to the BSA, researchers should be wary about assuming a vulnerable position and being at the receiving end of abuse given their online presence.

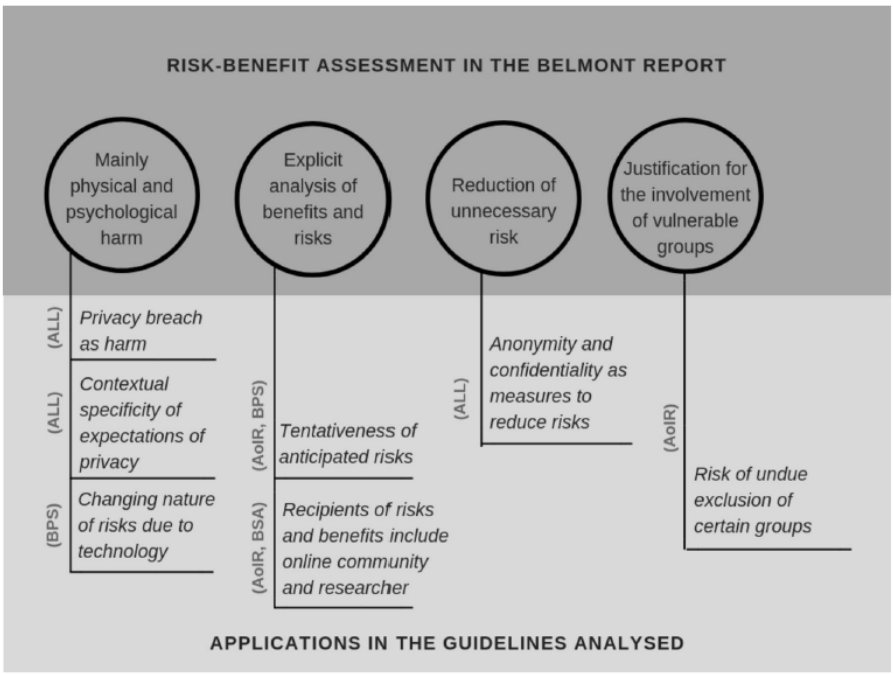

Figure 10. Comparison of the application of the beneficence principle as a function of risk–benefit assessment between the Belmont Report and the guidelines analysed

Justice

In relation to the protection of vulnerable groups in the first principle of respect for persons, the Belmont Report interprets justice to be a fair distribution of the risks and benefits of research and exemplifies its application in the selection of subjects. As we had previously mentioned, our analysis revealed that the applications of the justice principle are the least explicit of all three principles in the guidelines. The absence of the nomenclature used in the

Belmont Report may be due to the fact that the documents seek to provide guidance at a practical level. Secondly, research often involves overlapping applications of these principles wherein elements of the justice principle are subsumed in others, such as in the case of protecting vulnerable groups as a function of respect for persons. Thirdly, the implicitness of this principle may also be influenced by how different the manifestation of the principle of justice is in the textual (Bassett and O'Riordan 2002), and oftentimes social and participatory, nature of online research from the Belmont Report's biomedical roots. In online research settings, the focus is less likely on treatments and interventions and is instead geared towards information retrieval and group participation. Lastly, it may well be that the very ethical configurations that frame research in general are changing, making the issue of fairness reflected in the Belmont Report insufficient in defining an ethical research practice. Because of these reasons, we drew on existing literature to illuminate the implicit interpretations of justice and identified some gaps in its formulation, summarised in Fig. 11 below and which we will discuss in more detail in the following sub-sections.

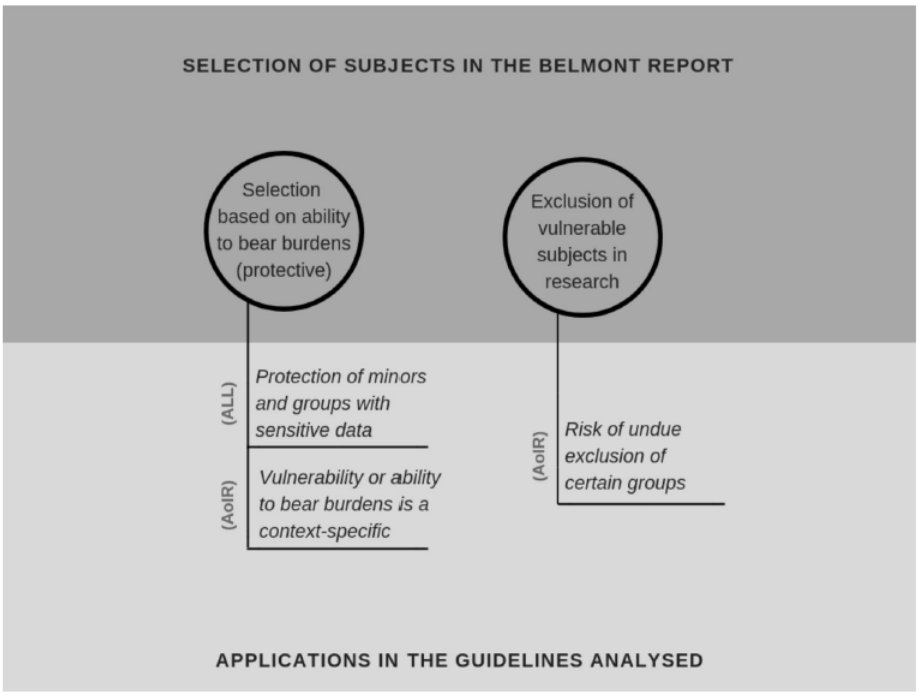

Figure 11. Comparison of the application of the justice principle as a function of subject selection between the Belmont Report and the guidelines analysed

PROTECTIONIST VERSUS INCLUSIVE ETHICS IN INTERNET RESEARCH

We found an overarching protectionist stance in the Belmont Report when approaching vulnerable groups that runs parallel with Shore's (2006) contention. This is understandably so, considering the fact that the conceptualisation of justice in the original Belmont Report was largely influenced by the exploitation of certain groups in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries for biomedical research. The prevailing social conditions at that time prompted an approach to ethics that was primarily concerned with avoiding the danger of recruiting certain profiles of individuals (e.g. ward patients, prisoners, rural black men, etc.) for experiments and clinical trials without them receiving the benefits of the research findings (National Commission 1979; Shore 2006). As a result, the Belmont Report pushed for a hierarchical selection procedure when recruiting subjects, opting for exclusion of disadvantaged groups to avoid further burdening them.

However, our analysis of the current internet research guidelines revealed a combination of protective and inclusive approach to the principle of justice. This is corroborated by Shore (2006), pointing out that the subsequent extensions of the Belmont Report from its original conception involve an awareness of the risk of certain groups' exclusion. Together with making sure that groups with highly sensitive data are protected, especially as they relate to the interest of children and minors, AoIR asks whether these groups are being excluded from research due to the difficulties in securing ethical approval. Even BPS acknowledges that some political activist groups may be open to non-anonymous publications of their information and responses in line with their mission as a community. In this regard, we see how the discourse is shifting from an exclusionary to an inclusionary language in the application of justice. This is consistent with Bassett and O'Riordan's (2002) study mentioned in the previous section, which provides a clear example of how an outright avoidance of what researchers would perceive as sensitive data can cause some voices to be silenced. They argue that academic researchers need to take into account the internet's various uses for a wide range of groups as well as the cultural production and visibility that it could provide for traditionally marginalised

populations. Walther (2002) and Kozinets (2015) also point out that both the textual and spatial qualities of internet use allow for different methodological approaches, such as a focus on the linguistic features of the text in the former and the more observational or anthropologic studies in the latter. As such, what counts as ethical decision-making would differ in these scenarios. Ultimately, researchers should be careful about swaying too far on the protectionist side when carrying out online research.

Shifting ethical frameworks

The inclusion–exclusion tension that surfaced in our analysis reveals a shift in the general understanding of what is deemed ethical in research. While the Belmont Report subscribes to fairness of distribution as an application of justice, the guidelines analysed are geared towards culturally sensitive and dialogic approaches that are open to negotiation. All the guidelines have retained the need to protect the welfare of those involved in the research, albeit an overarching theme is an appreciation of the multiplicity of meanings and expectations of individuals and communities online as well as the diversity of geographies, cultures and contexts in which they operate. Both the AoIR and the BSA promote a case-based or situational approach to ethics against a backdrop of changing technologies and possible uses of data found online. The reflexivity that characterises postmodern thinking has likely contributed to the changing definitions of harm and vulnerability that affects researchers' ethical decision-making. Thus, we cannot readily assume that groups that are traditionally considered vulnerable would want to be excluded from research.

Justice: gaps and future directions

We have found this principle to be the least developed in the documents analysed that, while not necessarily leading to unethical research, is something that warrants attention and explicitness in the future versions of these guidelines. The distributive justice that characterises the Belmont Report (Longres and Scanlon 2001) seems insufficient to cover the relational justice requirements of community research that abound on the internet (Shore 2006). In

practice, researchers are tasked to strike a balance between protection and effective participation. Adopting this approach opens up the possibility for researchers to what Hine (2005) identifies as political action through research, whose function is "to sidestep, transform, highlight, or reinvent some traditional political transformations, identities and inequalities" (p. 242). A widely reaching platform such as the internet can provide this leverage if used wisely.

Having considered the strong potential of the internet for democratisation (Mann and Stewart 2011), it would be helpful if the current guidelines could alert researchers to the various forms of sampling and recruitment issues inherent in online research, an element that appears to be lacking in the guidelines' current form. Several authors have alluded to the internet's non-representativeness of the general population (Eysenbach and Wyatt 2002; Im and Chee 2011) Therefore, the challenge that researchers are confronted with involves deciding if the internet is an appropriate methodological tool and, depending on the research design, whether or not extrapolating research findings to the general population is appropriate (Walther 2002).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we attempted to illuminate the conceptualisations and applications of the Belmont Report's ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice in internet-mediated research through a document analysis of five recent disciplinary guidelines with the greatest scientific impact in the field of social sciences. In general, the disciplinary guidelines' discourse is marked by a shift from a prescriptive to a more situational and dialogic approach to internet-mediated research ethics. This may alleviate the pains of a social science researcher who finally encounters forgiving ways to approach a research practice characterised by fast-paced technological advances and fuzzy social boundaries. It was also found that the existing guidelines reflect the core principles that originally appeared in the Belmont Report, albeit in varying degrees and with a nuanced understanding of its applications. The adapted informed consent procedures, increased awareness of risks to privacy, and the rather implicit reference

to justice-related issues are some of the highlighted differences with the Belmont Report's contents.

There are several recommendations we wish to make in the ongoing development of internet research ethics in light of this analysis. Firstly, the disciplinary associations' guidelines, with the exception of BPS's, were lacking in the definitive description or categorisation of the activities and tools involved in internet research. We argue that reflecting a clearer typology of what constitutes internet research in the document guidelines themselves would lead to a better understanding of their uses and intended applications for social science researchers. As our understanding of the typologies and activities involved in internet research widens, it will be a worthwhile endeavour for disciplinary associations to continue developing ways to draw the distinction between approaches that focus on the spatiality or textuality of internet-mediated research as they entail quite different ethical implications. Secondly, we find opportunities for enhancement in terms of making justice-related conceptualisations and applications explicit in the guidelines. This may be done by bringing researchers' attention to the possibility of unintentionally excluding certain groups and the ensuing loss of benefits for them as well as the sampling issues on the internet on the basis of user demographics. Consequently, researchers should be particularly attuned to the social impact of their studies as well as the internet's emancipatory potential for underserved groups—something that is otherwise lost when adopting unnecessarily stringent ethical standards.

While we acknowledge that this analysis has put forward a rather field-specific coverage of ethical issues, we believe that critically examining the current version of ethical guidelines released by relevant disciplinary associations proves valuable in the often complicated process of ethical decision-making in research. By outlining the gaps and providing recommendations, our hope is to contribute to promoting respect, beneficence, and justice in their varied forms—tensions notwithstanding—when utilising an ever-evolving medium that is the internet.

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Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Research involving human participants and/or animals This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors.

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International students' well-being achievements through the lens of the capability approach: A case study

Icy Fresno Anabo, Iciar Elexpuru-Albizuri, Lourdes Villardón-Gallego

Abstract

There is a substantial amount of literature demonstrating education's contributions in subjective life satisfaction as well as its positive impact in objective well-being indicators such as health and employment. However, less explored is the deeply personal value that students attach to the study experience and the range of achievements that enable them to lead full and meaningful lives. Drawing on Nussbaum's list of ten central capabilities and using narratives as a mode of inquiry, this chapter illustrates the well-being achievements of 22 students of different nationalities who attended a European-funded international master's programme in education studies. We found that they achieved four central capabilities in varying degrees: practical reason; affiliation; senses, imagination and thought; and work. These outcomes were mediated not only by the international features of the programme but also by a range of academic, agentic, and contextual factors. The chapter seeks to broaden the link between education and well-being to include not just its positional and instrumental benefits but also its role in enabling individuals to connect with their humanity and lead truly flourishing lives.

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FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The three articles presented in this work sit at the nexus of internationalisation, educational programme evaluation, and technology. They have attempted to critically engage with the underlying assumptions on the value of international higher education, the manner by which this has been evaluated, and the use of online means as a method for data collection. These three specific contributions, as well as a summary of the main findings of the dissertation, are discussed in more detail in the following sub-sections.

HIGHLIGHTS

The work conducted in this dissertation has yielded notable insights into what, why, and how to implement an evaluation of educational programmes with globally dispersed and international participants. The main findings are outlined below:

- Internet-based means of data collection for data collection has been conducive to the conduct of programme evaluations in international higher education. Social media platforms, online forms, and online interviews all present a rich source of data for this endeavour. *(Publications 1 and 3)*
- The preliminary descriptive analysis shows that the MALLL programme generally facilitated the attainment of European Commission's goals of boosting graduates' academic and professional mobility, although further mobility after graduation was higher for non-EU graduates. Additionally, it was found that while the transition period to work was marked by uncertainty, the sample's career trajectories post-graduation are aligned with the job roles foreseen and intended by the MALLL founders for its alumni. Pursuing doctorate studies also appeared to be a popular option among the graduates alongside assuming roles in teaching, consultancy, and management. They expressed a generally positive evaluation of MALLL's contribution towards their intercultural

experience and understanding, reporting an expansion of their personal and professional network through their MALLL participation. *(Publication 1)*

- Notwithstanding its benefits, conducting studies in this medium raises a number of ethical concerns. Firstly, there is a need to acknowledge the different ethical implications of a textual or observational treatment of internet data. When dealing with human participants, online research also presents specific considerations such as adapted informed consent procedures, awareness of privacy risks, and cognizance to protectionist practices in ethics that may serve to exclude rather than include. *(Publication 2)*
- Out of the three Belmont Report principles, justice was found to be the least developed in the documents analysed. While not necessarily leading to unethical research, it is a dimension that warrants attention and explicitness in the future versions of these guidelines. *(Publication 2)*
- Transformation is an important element of quality education that has so far been underrepresented in studies on the outcomes of international higher education. *(Publication 3)*
- The CA is a robust and workable framework through which to evaluate the outcomes of international higher education from a transformation perspective. The list offered by Nussbaum (2011) can be operationalised to conduct a qualitative evaluation of the broader outcomes gained through engaging in international higher education. *(Publication 3)*
- The international education programme analysed was instrumental in the development of participants' capabilities pertaining to their intellectual (practical reason; senses, imagination, and thought), social (affiliation), and professional lives (work). These capability achievements were mediated both by the programme's international (living abroad, multi-site mobility, and classroom diversity) and non-international features (study discipline, the mode of study offered, the availability of work-based and practical

learning arrangements, and the symbolic value of their degree) as well as a combination of agentic (personal choice, effort, or previous experiences) and structural factors (timing and significant events, hiring practices, and employer expectations). *(Publication 3)*

- Structural factors were particularly salient and modulating for the participants' capability for work. While the international element of the programme led to work success and participation for some, the outcomes were ultimately contingent on the interactions between their personal choices and the affordances provided by the context in which they operate. *(Publication 3)*

On the basis of these findings, this work contributes to the existing literature and practice in the field of international higher education in three ways: by expanding the breadth of educational evaluation through the concept of capabilities, adding an explanatory layer to evaluation practice through the use of critical realism, and identifying the possibilities and challenges of online research.

EXPANDING THE BREADTH OF EDUCATIONAL EVALUATION THROUGH CAPABILITIES

Both evaluation and education are fundamentally value-laden processes (O'Shea & Lorenzi, 2015). Indeed, there is an underlying and inherent element of ethics at play, making the prevalent culture of quantification and accountability unable to fully capture the humanistic and social dimensions of education. This dissertation has essentially served as a critique to this trend, arguing that it undermines the broader functions of education and the profound value of generating positive and life-enhancing changes as a basis for the legitimacy of educational programmes (Biesta, 2009; Stensaker & Harvey, 2011).

Building on the insight on important areas of student development identified in *Publication 1*, *Publication 3* infused a normative dimension to evaluation through the CA, reinforcing education's humanizing role and an intrinsically valuable vehicle for transformation and

human flourishing (O'Shea & Lorenzi, 2015; Walker, 2008; Brighouse & Unterhalter, 2010). The international programme case was found to present elements that aided in developing critical reflection, shifting students' values and life trajectories, and enabling many participants to live enriching and stimulating life experiences. These are valuable outcomes in themselves, and they are good not only because they led to instrumentally beneficial results but also because they support the inherent value of students' lives and choices. Ultimately, the publication has shown that a human development-focused evaluation is a workable framework through which to inspect the wider purposes, achievements, and limitations of education.

FROM A DESCRIPTIVE TO EXPLANATORY APPROACH TO PROGRAMME EVALUATION

Publication 3 attempts to deepen the descriptive-observational approach to evaluations by incorporating an explanatory dimension using CR's concept of a stratified reality. This supposes that the observable behaviour we seek to evaluate as part of the empirical domain is driven by mechanisms and specific configurations of these forces of in the domain of the actual and the real (Edgley, Stickley, Timmons, & Meal, 2016). It enriches the existing literature in evaluation methodologies by going beyond tangible indicators towards an in-depth understanding of the forces that drive social phenomena.

The empirical, methodological, and theory-building process implemented throughout *Publications 1, 2, and 3* culminate in the development of a human development-based evaluation model for student development and transformation, as presented in Figure 13 below. It is an amalgam of the various resources employed and proposes the consideration of three dimensions – value-outcome, temporal, and explanatory - in programme evaluations in education.

The value-outcome dimension is lifted from the CA, which serves as a normative guide about the inherent and instrumental value of education in overall human development. It uses the concept of capability achievements as a proxy for student outcomes. Meanwhile, the temporal dimension looks into the students' transformation through time, capturing their capability

achievements, either pre-existing or a result of their participation in an educational programme. Lastly, the explanatory dimension is informed by CR, which suggests a combination of descriptive and explanatory elements in documenting what has been achieved in and through education.

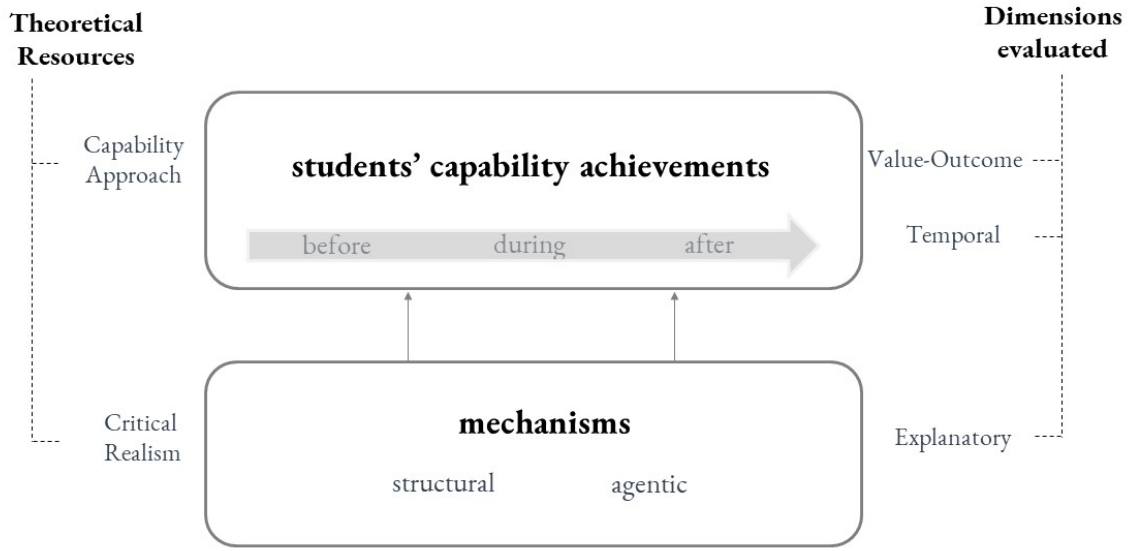

Figure 12. Working model of programme evaluation in higher education combining the CA and the CR. Author's own.

Operationalizing an explanatory evaluation model based on capability achievements can enable researchers, educators, and evaluators to capture the intangible yet worthwhile outcomes of international education. Furthermore, the three dimensions proposed can help clarify and systematise the organisation and analysis of qualitative evaluation data. The overarching hope is that as educational professionals, we are able to think and move beyond evaluations for the sake of measurement towards an expanded notion of education that is truly transformative, both as a matter of evaluation and practice.

SKETCHING THE POSSIBILITIES AND CHALLENGES OF ONLINE RESEARCH

In recent decades, there have been massive developments in the use of the internet for research both as a methodological tool and as an object of inquiry (Orton-Johnson, 2010). As technology

becomes increasingly ubiquitous and virtual interactions continue to proliferate, new opportunities are emerging for social scientists in this medium. The current COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted the central role of technology – such as online classes and online forms of data collection - to alleviate the effects of geographical restrictions. This thesis mainly contributes to the growing literature in the field pertaining to two main areas: the use of social networking sites as a source of evaluation data (*Publication 1*) and the ethical implications of internet-based research involving human subjects (*Publication 2*). While there are commonalities between research performed online and offline, several challenges are particularly unique to the internet context pertaining to data collection and protection, among others (Eynon, Fry, & Schroeder, 2008; Buchanan & Hvizdak, 2009) that warrant new models and approaches.

The use of social media in evaluation as tackled in *Publication 1* responds to the call for further research on this emerging topic (Cabero, Barroso, Llorente, & Yanes, 2016). In terms of applicability, it has shown that data collection in the professional social platform LinkedIn was a fruitful exercise in gathering relevant qualitative information and feedback from past graduates. Individual profiles served as a source of anonymised and aggregate data to generate an overview of the sample population through descriptive statistics. The qualitative data from group interactions were also a valuable source of students' perspectives regarding the programme's outcomes. These findings contribute to the current literature on evaluation methodologies, demonstrating the fruitfulness of online-based data collection for the conduct of institutional and programme assessments in international education and higher education in general.

Notwithstanding these benefits, the use of social media is also fraught with ethical challenges, as has been demonstrated by the commercialisation of private information and misuse of big data to thwart democratic processes (González, 2017). Given the salience of the issue in contemporary research context and the lack of substantial ethical guidance for this topic, a document analysis of the available guidelines from disciplinary institutions is presented in

Publication 2. It casts a new light on the Belmont Report, an authoritative document in research ethics, by revisiting its key principles in light of recent technological and methodological shifts. The publication offers a valuable contribution to literature and ethical practices in research by providing an updated set of conceptual reflections and practical applications of ethics in online research involving human participants. It argues that the current context calls for a combination of protectionist and dialogic approaches to ethical decision-making. This means that as much as the internet can generate undesirable results, it can also serve as an instrument for inclusion and emancipation. As such, a balance between strict regulations and a reflexive, negotiated approach to recruitment and data collection is essential. Given the rapidly evolving nature of internet technologies, providing an updated reflection on its use and implications in the field is a worthwhile pursuit.

CONCLUSIONS

The main research question that guided the study was 'How can we more broadly and deeply evaluate the impact of international higher education on students' transformation using ethical internet-mediated research?' For this, the work was divided into four specific objectives addressing a number of related methodological (Objectives 1 and 2) and conceptual (Objectives 3 and 4) considerations. The methodological objectives aimed to illuminate the emerging possibilities for data collection given the international and multi-site nature of the participants' geography. Meanwhile, the theoretical objectives were set to rectify the limitations of a quantification- and accountability- focused approach prevalent in the existing studies in the field.

Publication 1 was an exploratory attempt to evaluating the outcomes of an international higher education programme and was oriented towards analysing the potential of social online and internet-based means of data collection (Objective 1) and providing a descriptive and exploratory evaluation of the outcomes of an international higher education programme (Objective 3). In relation the first objective, it was able to illustrate the fruitfulness and challenges of using social media as a source of evaluation data especially in programmes with global participants. This exercise led to the conclusion that social media platforms such as LinkedIn, when employed strategically and ethically, can provide evaluators with rich and insightful data. Additionally, *Publication 1* was able to address the third objective by presenting a preliminary analysis of the outcomes of the education program in question using the European Commission's institutional goals of mobility, employability, and interculturality. The results showed that the programme facilitated the graduates' academic and professional mobility in varying degrees. The sample's career profiles also indicate that their roles post-graduation are in line with MALLL's intended outcomes related to employability. Meanwhile,

positive outcomes were perceived by the graduates pertaining to their interculturality. As a result of this preliminary work in *Publication 1*, aspects of student development that warranted a more in-depth analysis were identified. This limitation was taken up and addressed in *Publication 3* by presenting a theory-based and qualitative evaluation of the case's outcomes on students' development through the lens of the capability approach. It also prompted the need for a more careful analysis of the ethical requirements of internet-mediated research among human participants, which was followed through in *Publication 2*.

With the prospect of employing online research (online semi-structured online interviews) in the subsequent phase of the dissertation work, *Publication 2* built on the ethical implications mentioned in *Publication 1* to perform a critical appraisal of the ethical implications of data collection, analysis, and storage in this medium (Objective 2). This proved imperative given the limited ethical guidance on the topic. The study used the Belmont Report – arguably the most cited ethical guidance framework in research - as a key reference for the analysis. Ongoing discussions on research ethics use its principles of respect, beneficence, and justice to gauge ethical sensitivity, making them a good point of departure for exploring research practices when using the internet. Following a directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), it was concluded that the Belmont Report's principles of respect and beneficence were explicitly conveyed in the documents analysed, offering nuanced interpretations on issues of informed consent, privacy, and benefits and risks as well as providing actionable recommendations for the implementation of traditional methods in the online setting. However, the invocations of the principle of justice were rather implicit and reflect an important shift from the Belmont Report's protectionist ethical position towards more situational and dialogic approaches. The insights that emerged from *Publication 2* informed the data collection approach in *Publication 3*, outlining the tensions and practical applications of the ethical use of the internet as a methodological tool.

Publication 3 aims to expand the scope of educational evaluations beyond mere accountability in two ways. First, it proposes and operationalises Nussbaum's (2011) work on the CA as a

normative framework to assess the contributions of the programme case to the students' broader development and well-being (Objective 4). In this regard, it was found that that the programme analysed was instrumental to the achievement of participants' fundamental freedoms such as practical reason, affiliation, senses, imagination, and thought, and work, demonstrating the personal and social dimensions of such an educational arrangement. It is also worth noting that while certain capabilities are mutually reinforcing (such as the case of practical reason and affiliation), there was evidence of some capability combinations that had a modulating or restrictive effect when combined with agentic and contextual factors. As illustrated in *Publication 3*, capability of affiliation can impact individuals' capability of work positively (as when students are able to expand their professional network) or negatively (as when personal relationships constrain one's geographical choice and labour market opportunities).

Secondly, *Publication 3* aimed to provide an additional analytical layer that infuses an explanatory dimension to the descriptive focus common in existing evaluations. By using critical realist reasoning (abductive and retroductive) as well as related concepts of structure and agency as generative mechanisms, *Publication 3* was able to illuminate a number of likely factors that shape the students' capability achievements, including the international dimensions of the programme (living abroad, multi-site mobility, and classroom diversity), non-international programme elements (such as the programme's discipline, the mode of study offered, the availability of work-based and practical learning arrangements, and the symbolic value of their degree), individual agency (personal choice, effort, or previous experiences) and contextual factors (such as timing and significant events, hiring practices, and employer expectations). It has exemplified the opportunities as well as the limits of the international dimension of higher education. The latter is particularly salient in the participants' capability for work, which was more contingent on agentic and structural factors than the educational programme itself. Mismatch in students' expectations and employer demands, an unfamiliarity with a foreign labour market, and structural biases in hiring foreign workers were just some of

the identified barriers in achieving meaningful and rewarding work post-graduation. The paper concluded that educational programmes could provide support by strengthening the agentic capacities of students for making strategic and informed choices through career planning and insight, work-based learning opportunities, and close mentorships.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The results presented in this work open up a wealth of opportunities for future investigations. Firstly, the case study adopted can be used as a basis for analytic generalisation (Yin, 2009). While it is unable to generate all-encompassing or generalisable claims about the impact of international higher education, it provides a conceptual toolkit that may be applied empirically for a bigger sample or between cases. Future studies in this regard can greatly contribute to conceptual refinement. Additionally, while a mainly qualitative approach was employed in this study, both the CR and the CA accommodate mixed methodologies. Indeed, quantitative studies using sophisticated approaches (e.g. multiple regressions) and other forms of triangulation are encouraged to provide an additional layer of empirical analysis. Future evaluation studies, regardless of the methodology employed, could be improved by being aware of the ontological foundations of their work and being explicit about how these affect their epistemological choices.

Methodologically, the study relied on a retrospective analysis of outcomes. Future studies are encouraged to explore longitudinal assessments to more accurately capture the snapshots of students' capability achievements and situations across time. Personal narratives are instrumental in capturing the salient aspects of personal growth and transformation (Bauer, McAdams, & Pals, 2006), yet studies that tap on a wider range of data sources (such as focus groups, student surveys, a review of online and offline artefacts, among others) are equally encouraged. In keeping with the ethics dimension of this work, future contributions in the topic of online research are suggested given the quickly evolving nature of this field.

Moving forward, researchers are encouraged to expand on the CA's applicability in education. For instance, this work can provide the basis for the development of qualitative indicators when evaluating educational quality in international study programmes or higher education in general. Additionally, researchers may be interested in expanding the scope of the study by considering not just the substantive contributions of education - as illustrated in this dissertation by examining individual students' capability achievements through their educational participation - but also its distributive component such as inequality of access and educational disadvantage along economic, gender, and geographical lines. The proposed framework may also be expanded towards examining the collective capabilities of non-student groups such as teaching staff and education leaders. Lastly, it would be worthwhile to explore how a capability-based programme evaluation in education could be combined with a capability-based curriculum (Flores-Crespo, 2007; Crosbie, 2011). This combination will allow universities to understand and document whether they are addressing wider issues such as human development and flourishing.

Overall, the publications presented in this work embody an overarching purpose: to reflect on and rethink the ethics of research, evaluation, and education. By reconfiguring the notion of educational value from a transformation- and human development-based perspective and assessing the methods that we employ to study and evaluate educational arrangements, this dissertation is hopefully able to spark a genuine sense of academic commitment to delivering a kind of education that is ethical, impactful, and supportive of individual and collective flourishing.

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Appendices

APPENDIX 1. LIST OF COUNTRIES UNDER THE REGIONAL CATEGORIES USED IN PUBLICATION 1 AND PUBLICATION 3

PUBLICATION 1	PUBLICATION 3
Europe: EU and EEA-EFTA Countries. Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, United Kingdom	**European Union Member States.** Greece, Hungary, United Kingdom
Europe: Non-EU EEA-EFTA Countries. Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania, Serbia, Russia, Ukraine	**Non-EU Programme Country.** Serbia
	Eastern Partnership Countries. Armenia, Georgia, Ukraine
	Russian Federation. Russia
Asia Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Hong Kong, Iran, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, South Korea, Thailand, Turkey, Vietnam	**Asia.** Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam
	Central Asia. Kazakhstan
North America. Canada, United States	**Other Industrialised Countries.** United States
South America. Colombia	**Latin America.** Brazil, Colombia
Africa. Ethiopia, Ghana	**Africa, Caribbean, and Pacific Countries.** Ethiopia

APPENDIX 2. LIST OF ANALYSED PROFILES (PUBLICATION 1)

Cohort	ID	Regional category	Gender
2008	2008/01*	Asia	M
	2008/02*	Non-EU Europe	F
	2008/03	Non-EU Europe	M
	2008/04	Asia	M
	2008/05	Asia	F
	2008/06	Asia	M
	2008/07	Asia	M
	2008/08	Asia	M
	2008/09	Asia	F
	2008/10	Asia	M
2009	2009/11*	Asia	M
	2009/12*	Asia	M
	2009/13	Non-EU Europe	F
	2009/14	Asia	M
	2009/15	Non-EU Europe	F
	2009/16	Asia	M
	2009/17	Asia	F
	2009/18	Asia	M
	2009/19	Asia	F
	2009/20	Africa	M
	2009/21	Asia	F
	2009/22	Asia	F
	2009/23	Asia	M
	2009/24	Asia	F
2010	2010/25	North America	F
	2010/26	Asia	M
	2010/27	Asia	M
	2010/28	Asia	F
	2010/29	North America	M
	2010/30	Asia	M
	2010/31	Africa	M

	2010/32	Asia	F
	2010/33	Africa	M
	2010/34*	Asia	F
	2010/35	Asia	M
	2010/36	EU/EA-EFTA	F
	2010/37	Asia	M
	2010/38*	North America	F
	2010/39	EU/EA-EFTA	F
2011	2011/40*	Asia	F
	2011/41	Non-EU Europe	F
	2011/42	Non-EU Europe	F
	2011/43*	Non-EU Europe	F
	2011/44	North America	F
	2011/45	Asia	F
	2011/46	Non-EU Europe	M
2012	2012/47	EU/EA-EFTA	F
	2012/48	Asia	F
	2012/49	Asia	F
	2012/50	Non-EU Europe	F
	2012/51	Africa	M
	2012/52	Asia	F
	2012/53	Asia	F
	2012/54	EU/EA-EFTA	F
	2012/55	Asia	F
	2012/56	EU/EA-EFTA	M
	2012/57	North America	F
	2012/58	Non-EU Europe	F
	2012/59*	South America	F
	2012/60	EU/EA-EFTA	F
	2012/61*	Asia	M
2013	2013/62	Non-EU Europe	F
	2013/63	EU/EA-EFTA	F
	2013/64	EU/EA-EFTA	M
	2013/65*	Africa	M
	2013/66	EU/EA-EFTA	F
	2013/67	EU/EA-EFTA	F

	2013/68	EU/EA-EFTA	F
	2013/69	Non-EU Europe	F
	2013/70	EU/EA-EFTA	F
2014	2014/71*	EU/EA-EFTA	M
	2014/72	Asia	F
	2014/73	North America	F
	2014/74	Non-EU Europe	F
	2014/75	EU/EA-EFTA	F

APPENDIX 3. PARTICIPANT PROFILES (PUBLICATION 3)

Participant	Batch	Sex	Funding	Regional category	Prior mobility
Joseph	1	M	Full scholarship	Asia	Yes
Julia	1	F	Full scholarship	Russian Federation	Yes
Ana	2	F	Full scholarship	Eastern Partnership Countries	Yes
Ivan	2	M	Full scholarship	Asia	Yes
Jane	3	F	Full scholarship	Other Industrialised Countries	Yes
Katrina	3	F	Full scholarship	Eastern Partnership Countries	Yes
Lei	3	F	Full scholarship	Asia	No
Maja	3	F	Full scholarship	Non-EU Programme Country	Yes
Lily	4	F	Full scholarship	Asia	Yes
Omar	5	M	Full scholarship	Asia	No
Catarina	5	F	Full scholarship	Latin America	Yes
Ayo	6	M	Full scholarship	Africa, Caribbean and Pacific Countries	No
Adrian	7	M	Self-funded	Member States of the European Union	Yes
Dara	7	F	Full scholarship	Asia	Yes
Li	7	M	Full scholarship	Asia	No
Fernanda	8	F	Full scholarship	Latin America	Yes
Sophia	8	F	Full scholarship	Non-EU Programme Country	No
Jack	8	M	Full scholarship	Member States of the European Union	Yes
Dao	9	F	Full scholarship	Asia	Yes
Victoria	9	F	Full scholarship	Central Asia	Yes
Martin	9	M	Full scholarship	Member States of the European Union	Yes
Mariam	10	F	Full scholarship	Eastern Partnership Countries	Yes

APPENDIX 4. INFORMED CONSENT FORM

SECTION 1

You are asked to participate in a Ph.D. research study conducted by Icy Anabo from the Department of Psychology and Education of the University of Deusto, with Lourdes Villardón and Itziar Elexpuru providing research oversight and supervision. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please read the information in the succeeding sections and ask questions via e-mail (icyanabo@deusto.es) about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to participate.

Going through the items in this consent form and questionnaire takes approximately 10 minutes. Thank you in advance for your time.

Please indicate an email address below where we can send a summary of your responses. This will serve as your personal copy of the consent form.

SECTION 2: Purpose of the Study

While anecdotal reports of students describe their international study experience as life-changing and transformative, current programme evaluation approaches relying on alumni surveys rarely capture this aspect of the educational experience and raise a number of conceptual and methodological issues.

This study entitled "Evaluating the Transformative Outcomes of International Degree Mobility: A MALLL Case Study" conceptualises international higher education as a transformative experience, drawing on philosophical and sociological perspectives to rectify these limitations by proposing an alternative model that looks into what students want (aspirations), what they have (capital), what they do (agency), and the interactions between these dimensions as measures of programme success.

This model provides a new vocabulary for evaluators and educators to speak of international student mobility as a transformative experience that spans the personal and professional

histories of the students, providing a conceptual basis from which future quantitative and qualitative evaluation approaches may be developed.

SECTION 3: Overview of Procedures

Your participation will be in the form of a digitally recorded interview (only the screen and audio will be recorded). For online interviews, you will need a desktop or laptop with reliable internet connection, microphone, and speakers (may be built-in in your device) during the interview. For face-to-face interviews, you do not need to bring anything as I will be using my own laptop for the recording.

DURATION: The interview is anticipated to last between one (1) and one and a half (1.5) hours long.

CONTENT: I will invite you to talk about your circumstances, motivations, and experiences before, during, and after your Erasmus Mundus master's programme. You'll also be asked to draw a simple line graph on the screen using your mouse.

SECTION 4: Potential Benefits and Risks

Benefits

The interview will allow you to reflect on your experience and grant you an opportunity to share your views and opinions. Your participation will also be of considerable benefit for educational purposes by encouraging an understanding of the broader and significant processes of transformation among international students through the Erasmus Mundus programme and in turn affect policy and practice in the field of higher education internationalisation.

Risks

This project is not intended to provoke any physical or emotional discomfort. However, you may choose to share sensitive and confidential information during the interview. As the

interviews are stored digitally, there is a slight possibility of privacy breach beyond the researcher's control. Either way, all efforts will be made to ensure confidentiality and anonymity in the reporting of results as well as protection of your digitally stored data.

Section 5: Data storage and protection

The interview (audio and screen) will be recorded and stored as an mp4 file in the researcher's work computer and the cloud (Google Drive), both password-protected.

Interview transcriptions will be saved as password-protected files. Pseudonyms will be used in the transcript, with the possibility of using one of your own choosing if you wish to do so. Your full name and other pertinent details will be stored in a separate password-protected file and will only be used strictly for this research's purposes.

Any physical copies of the interview transcriptions will be stored securely.

Your experiences might be published in academic journals or presented in international conferences. They will be presented in a way that does not identify you unless your specific permission is secured.

Access to your information will be available only to the researcher and those responsible for research oversight (Lourdes Villardón and Itziar Elexpuru as thesis supervisors and the Institutional Research Board members).

Section 6: Participation and Withdrawal

You can choose whether or not to be in this study. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, by sending a request for withdrawal by email to icyanabo@deusto.es (e.g. "I would like to withdraw from this study and have the data that had been collected deleted"). You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer during the interview.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact the researcher or any of the research supervisors:

Icy Anabo, email: icyanabo@deusto.es

Lourdes Villardón, email: lourdes.villardon@deusto.es

Itziar Elexpuru, email: elexpuru@deusto.es

Section 7: Consent

By clicking yes below and submitting this form, you are consenting to participate in this research. Your responses will be sent to your email address and it will serve as your personal copy of the consent form.

I fully understand the procedures described above. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate in this study.

- Yes

Given name and surname: _____

APPENDIX 5: QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS

Preferred email for correspondence

Skype username

If you prefer Google Hangout, indicate your username

Date of Birth

Sex

- Male
- Female

Country of citizenship

Current city and country of residence (e.g. Bilbao, Spain)

Current job position or professional activity (can be more than one)

Your university degree, awarding institution, and year of graduation (e.g. BS Psychology, University of Deusto, 2007)

Master´s degree/s aside from MALLL, awarding institution, and year of graduation (e.g. Master´s in Business Administration, University of Deusto, 2012), if any:

Start year of MALLL programme

- 2006
- 2007
- 2008
- 2009
- 2010
- 2011

- 2012
- 2013
- 2014
- 2015

MALLL mobility (where you spent your first year, third, and fourth semesters, respectively):

- London-Bilbao-Copenhagen
- Copenhagen-Bilbao-London
- London-Bilbao-Bilbao
- Copenhagen-Bilbao-Bilbao
- London-Bilbao-London
- Copenhagen-Bilbao-Copenhagen

Erasmus Mundus Funding

- Erasmus Mundus scholarship Category A (Partner country)
- Erasmus Mundus Scholarship Category B (Programme country)
- Full scholarship (Other)
- Partial scholarship (Other)
- Fully self-funded
- Other

Had you ever been outside your home country for work/leisure prior to your MALLL participation?

- Yes
- No

What was the reason for your stay outside your home country prior to MALLL? (tick all that apply)

- not applicable, I had not been outside my home country prior to MALLL

- short academic courses or summer school
- full-time study (university degree or master´s)
- seminars or conferences
- volunteer work
- leisure trip
- other

Your father´s highest educational attainment

- PhD
- Master´s
- University degree (at least 3 years in higher education)
- Vocational degree or certificate of professional training (3 years or less in post-compulsory education)
- Compulsory secondary education
- Other

Your mother´s highest educational attainment

- PhD
- Master´s
- University degree (at least 3 years in higher education)
- Vocational degree or certificate of professional training (3 years or less in post-compulsory education)
- Compulsory secondary education
- Other

Has anybody in your immediate family (parents or siblings) been abroad for study purposes?

- Yes
- No