

School Placements Abroad – A Rich Learning Environment for Pre-Service Primary EFL Teachers

Abstract

For many years educators and academics have been asking for a high quality education for EFL teachers in the primary sector including a long-term stay abroad to broaden future teachers' horizons by living and working in countries where English is spoken as the first language. In order to meet these demands the PrimA (Praktikum im Ausland) programme was initiated in 2004. It is characterized by six factors that have proven themselves to encourage mobility among EFL students. The PrimA coordinator works in active cooperation with 21 primary schools in England and Wales. Over the years, PrimA has become a key component in the University of Wuppertal's internationalization strategy and has made an outstanding contribution to increasing student teacher mobility, so far allowing some 200 students the opportunity to spend one term gaining first-hand experience of teaching abroad.

PrimA is based on the assumption that a school placement abroad will have beneficial effects especially on students' planning competence and on their teaching skills (Diehr 2013a, b). The "European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages" (EPOSTL) is one of the few instruments covering the competences addressed in PrimA. It was initially designed as a self-reflection tool (Newby et al. 2007: 5). We therefore concerned ourselves with the question whether the EPOSTL could also serve as an assessment tool in a future evaluation of PrimA. Students participating in PrimA in 2010 to 2015 (N = 177) were asked to fill in an abridged and modified version of the questionnaire twice, before and after the school placement abroad. Statistical analyses of the seven sections of the questionnaire indicate unidimensional constructs and satisfactory reliabilities. Despite this positive evidence, informal feedback from the participants reveals the need for improvement on the instrument. Finally, a comparison of the pre-post data shows an increase in the self-assessment as regards all seven sections. Implications for a future evaluation are discussed.

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