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Ten Years of Adult Education Academy: Contributing to Internationalisation in Higher Education

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Summary: The Marrakech Framework for Action underlines the importance of professionalisation of adult educators. In this context, international academic professionalisation plays an important role. The Adult Education Academy, offered at the University of Würzburg, is aimed at international master's students, doctoral students and practitioners in adult education and can be taken as an example. The evaluation data show that structured preparation is necessary to enable a valuable exchange. Furthermore, intercultural exchange among participants is highly appreciated. When the pandemic-related online years of the program are considered, the data show little difference from the face-to-face years. In terms of the different groups of participants, the data indicate that joint programmes for students and practitioners help to strengthen international career perspectives for the field.

Keywords: Academic professionalisation, adult education, lifelong learning, mobility

Zusammenfassung: Im Aktionsrahmen von Marrakesch wird die Bedeutung der internationalen (akademischen) Professionalisierung von Erwachsenenbildner*innen unterstrichen. Die an der Universität Würzburg angebotene Adult Education Academy richtet sich an internationale Masterstudierende, Doktorand*innen und Praktiker*innen der Erwachsenenbildung und kann als Beispiel herangezogen werden. Die Evaluationsdaten zeigen, dass eine strukturierte Vorbereitung notwendig ist, um einen wertvollen Austausch zu ermöglichen, der darüber hinaus sehr geschätzt wird. Werden die pandemiebedingten Online-Jahre des Programms betrachtet, so zeigen die Daten kaum Unterschiede zu den Präsenzzahlen. In Bezug auf die verschiedenen Teilnehmendengruppen deuten die Daten darauf hin, dass gemeinsame Programme für Studierende und Praktiker*innen dazu beitragen, internationale Karriereperspektiven für das Feld zu stärken.

Schlüsselbegriffe: Akademische Professionalisierung, Erwachsenenbildung, lebenslanges Lernen, Mobilität

1 Introduction

Various policy papers (e.g. International Council for Adult Education 2020; International Commission on the Futures of Education 2021) and most recently the Marrakech Framework for Action (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning 2022), established under CONFINTEA VII in 2022, emphasise the importance of professionalisation of adult education. This is related to the human right to education, including adult education, highlighted in the Framework. In this context, reference is made to the need for quality education, which requires highly qualified personnel that can react to the development towards a globalised and interconnected world. These conditions can mean changing and increasing demands for adult educators (Schreiber-Barsch / Stang 2021). In order to meet these demands, the Marrakech Framework defines higher education institutions as key factor to professionalise adult educators. This attribution can be supported with recourse to literature (Boffo / Giolo 2017), which points out that university preparation is closely linked to the requirements of a professional activity. Of central importance, according to the authors, are international higher education programmes, as they can be seen as essential for preparing students for careers that will endure and thrive in a globalised world. With the onset of globalisation processes, internationalisation has become an important strategy for mobilising resources in higher education (Varghese 2017). From this, it can be deduced that internationalisation and professionalisation can be seen as intertwined.

Started in 2014, the Adult Education Academy is aimed at master's and doctoral students as well as practitioners in the field of adult and continuing education around the world. It is a programme that, in addition to professionalisation, can contribute to internationalisation in the field. Integrated into master programmes, the Adult Education Academy is an international

academic qualification opportunity for people intending or already working in the field of adult and continuing education (Schüßler / Egetenmeyer 2018).

This paper addresses the question on how the Adult Education Academy has contributed to the internationalisation of higher education programmes in adult and lifelong learning during the past ten years. In a first step, internationalisation in academic professionalisation is outlined (section 2). In a second step, the development of the Adult Education Academy is traced (section 3). In a third step, the contribution of internationalisation in academic professionalisation by the Academy is examined on the basis of selected evaluation results of the study programme (section 4). Finally, the study is summarised with regard to the research objective, and an outlook on the future design of international study programmes is given.

2 Internationalisation in Academic Professionalisation

With Boffo / Giolo (2017), the development towards an increasingly globalised world can be linked to internationalisation. As a consequence of these developments, the authors note the need for the higher education sector to adapt to the accompanying changes, but also point to the active role in shaping them by developing and implementing internationalisation concepts. In this article, internationalisation is understood as a consciously designed process of integrating intercultural, global, and international dimensions that are intended to lead to an improvement in educational quality (Knight 2008). One way of ensuring the quality of education in higher education is through academic professionalisation.

With Egetenmeyer / Lattke (2009), it can be pointed out that professionalisation is not to be understood nationally or European, but internationally. For further conceptual delineation, Schüßler / Egetenmeyer (2018) are consulted, who attribute to academic professionalisation a structural and subjective perspective with a social and educational policy framing. The latter can be understood to mean that academic professionalisation is shaped by changes in educational policy, the labour market, and academia. Furthermore, the development towards an interconnected and globalised world can be determined with Jones (2017) as an influence on professionalisation. Within this framing, Schüßler / Egetenmeyer (2018) embed the two perspectives on academic professionalisation. The subjective perspective refers to the development of adult educators' professionalism. Professionalisation in this context is understood as the development and expansion of an academic knowledge base that they can transfer to practice in order to act in a reflective and individualised manner (Gieseke 2018; Schreiber-Barsch / Stang 2021). Lastly, the structural perspective is considered, with Schüßler / Egetenmeyer (2018), as being related to the education and training opportunities at universities. In this regard, the authors point out that university courses do not have to impart academic knowledge exclusively; it is important to have opportunities to reflect on knowledge and content as well as to gain experience in the practical field. With reference to Egetenmeyer / Lattke (2009), it can be concluded that a university course of study can contribute to the professional development of adult educators.

In this respect, different strategies for promoting internationalisation can be derived from the literature. One strategy can be found in conducting research projects with the goal of improving both skills and knowledge in specific areas that are relevant to multinational teams (Egetenmeyer / Guimaraes / Németh 2017). Another strategy can be found in the enrolment of international students (Egetenmeyer 2017) and the conduction of international teaching settings that deal with discussions on issues influenced by international trends and organisations, discourses, and programmes (Egetenmeyer / Guimaraes / Németh 2017). This can mean looking at paradigms and concepts on adult education from international organisations, such as UNESCO or OECD, but also discussing advocacy organisations, such as ICAE or EAEA, to address relevant trends (Egetenmeyer 2022). With regard to the field of practice, it can be added

with Schüßler / Egetenmeyer (2018) that a critical examination of the international professional field and the subsequently accompanied reflection in the university context is another important strategy. Further, in this context, Egetenmeyer (2022) speaks of introducing comparative adult education as approach, which is associated, on the one hand, with the identification and development of comparable categories and, on the other hand, with the study and research of international education policies. This can enable the identification of differences and commonalities within adult education. Moreover, Egetenmeyer (2017) refers to known initiatives, such as the ERASMUS programmes, which show these efforts by giving both students and teachers the opportunity to travel to universities in different countries and participate in their teaching programmes. This can go hand in hand with the introduction of study programmes with module structures and recognition models, in which credit-points (ECTS) can be earned that are recognised at the student's own university. Referring to the author, another strategy can be found in the offer of English language courses and the recognition of internationally acquired academic achievements, which can support internationalisation. With reference to Olesen (2000), it can be added that international research networks in adult education, with young researchers, especially doctoral students, are important to establish international collaboration in scientific practice. Finally, Varghese (2017) can be referred to point to the development of curricula with an international focus that can help students acquire intercultural and international knowledge and understanding, critical thinking, and communication skills, even if they remain at their home universities.

3 Development and Structure of the Adult Education Academy

The Adult Education Academy 'International and comparative studies in adult education and lifelong learning'¹ is a study programme that unites and develops the ideas elaborated above. It can be described as an intensive programme, developed by an international cooperation of European universities,² which was further developed within two European projects, Comparative Studies in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning, and International and Comparative Studies for Students and Practitioners in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning. It targets international master's, doctoral students and practitioners in adult and lifelong learning, in which the students enter into a "process of understanding international and intercultural phenomena" (Egetenmeyer 2017).

Hosted by the University of Würzburg, the Academy is designed as a joint module in which participants learn and discuss theoretical perspectives and insights into international policies and theories in adult and lifelong learning but also work on a comparison on selected topics in small groups. Further interdependent objectives are: to analyse European policies in lifelong learning and those from international organisations that refer to adult and lifelong learning, to provide students insights into current research issues, to develop methodological skills that strengthen students' analysis of the relationship between theories, policies/politics and empirical practice in adult and lifelong learning, to use English as a language to promote a common international communication in adult education, to cultivate intercultural competencies, to expand and support the development of international networks and partnerships and to implicitly provide students with didactical insights, such as online learning environments, interactive and programme design learning settings (Egetenmeyer 2017).

¹ Until 2021 the Adult Education Academy was known as Winter School.

² The partner universities are the University of Florence, the University of Lisbon, Helmut Schmidt University Hamburg, the University of Pécs, the University of Ljubljana, the University of Padua, Dublin City University, the University of Belgrade, Bayero University Kano, West Liberty University, Obafemi Awolowo University, the International Institute of Adult and Lifelong Learning in Delhi and the University of Delhi. Partners from practice are DVV International and EAEA.

As joint module, the Adult Education Academy is divided into three parts – a preparatory phase, a two-week intensive programme and a follow-up. To prepare for the two-week programme in February, participants are provided with readings on European policies in lifelong learning, which build the basis for the first week. Furthermore, students write a transnational essay oriented on their home context (e.g. country) and on selected subtopics in adult and lifelong learning to prepare for the comparative group work. Practitioners are asked to prepare a good practice presentation related to their (local) work context.

In the first week, European and international theories, policies and strategies in lifelong learning are analysed and discussed. The theoretically and analytically based perspectives and discussions are accompanied by field visits to adult education institutions and providers in Würzburg and around as well as by discussions and presentations of European stakeholders in adult and lifelong learning. In the second week, the participants work in small groups together with moderators, mostly consisting of a professor and academic staff, who guide the participants in comparing their national approaches to implementing lifelong learning as representatives of their home country. For doctoral students and moderators, the joint module is made complete by the possibility to publish a comparative research paper related to the work in their group. Furthermore, the joint module gives students the opportunity to earn credit-points (ECTS) within their own universities. For this purpose, module structures have been developed which have been adopted by several partner universities and which go hand in hand with the enrolment of students at the University of Würzburg.

While the two-week intensive programme up to, and including, 2020 was always carried out in the presence, in the years 2021 and 2022, due to the COVID-19-pandemic, a switch had to be made to a completely virtual implementation. Using video conference systems and online tools, the participants took part in the first week's classes, attended in virtual field visits in Würzburg and around the world and conducted the comparative group work in the small groups in the second week.

In the next step, the contribution to internationalisation will be examined in more detail on the basis of selected evaluation results.

4 The Contribution of the Adult Education Academy to Internationalisation in Academic Professionalisation

4.1 Methodology

In the year 2016, the impact of the Adult Education Academy from the participants' point of view was systematically surveyed for the first time. Therefore, an evaluation questionnaire with open and closed questions was developed together with the German Institute for Adult Education (DIE) (Lattke / Egetenmeyer 2017) and adapted according to the changes in the programme by the staff of the University of Würzburg for each following year. The external evaluation can be mainly divided into two parts: the first part focuses on the participants' interest and motivation before their participation. The second part addresses the effects and outcomes of the joint module in terms of interests and competences as well as personal and academic perspectives. To understand the results, it is important to know that different people with different backgrounds, countries of origin, and degrees participated in the Academy in each year. It follows that there is not one recurring group that serves as a sample, but rather a different composition at each survey period.

The data of the present article is based on the evaluation results from the years 2016 to 2022. As explained above, the aim of the evaluation is to generate knowledge about the interest, motivation and competences before and after the contribution of the Academy in order to

improve the event. As this article refers to the research question “How does the Adult Education Academy contribute to the internationalisation of the higher education study programmes in the field of adult and lifelong learning?”, the evaluation, which does not specifically ask about the aspect of internationalisation, cannot provide a clear answer. Therefore, a secondary analysis is carried out here. This means that certain items are selected and interpreted from the evaluation that are related to internationalisation and thus to the research question of this paper.

The data of the evaluation (see Tab. 1) show, that between 59 and 84 participants filled in the questionnaire of the evaluation. That is a return rate of 79% as lowest value and 100% as highest value.

Table 1 Sample characteristics (source: authors' own)

Year	Total	N	Master students	Doctoral students	Practitioners	Other	Return rate
2016	82	82	51 (62.2%)	23 (28.15%)	-	8 (9.8%)	100%
2017	84	84	50 (59.5%)	32 (38.1%)	-	2 (2.4%)	100%
2018	65	59	31 (52.5%)	14 (23.7%)	-	14 (23.7%)	91%
2019	67	67	43 (64%)	15 (32%)	9 (14%)	-	100%
2020	89	70	31 (44%)	25 (36%)	14 (20%)	-	79%
2021	72	61	28 (46%)	18 (29%)	10 (16%)	5 (8.2%)	85%
2022	86	77	43 (55.8%)	24 (31.2%)	10 (13%)	5 (6.5%)	90%

Over the seven years, people from more than 40 countries all over the world³ participated in the Academy. Having a look at the study status, the biggest group of participants were the master's students who ranged in the different years between 44% and 64% of the sample. The second biggest group were the doctoral students with 24% to 38%. From 2019 to 2022, practitioners participated in the Academy and constituted the third biggest group with 13% to 20%. In addition, some other groups participated in the Academy and its evaluation, for example staff of universities or very few bachelor students at the end of their studies. As they are a small group and as this article aims to focus on the participants of the programme, their results will not be listed separately.

In the following, selected evaluation results on the contribution of the Adult Education Academy as an adult and lifelong learning programme at a university to the internationalisation of higher education programmes in adult and lifelong learning are analysed. For this purpose, two of the strategies described above are singled out.

4.2 Creation of Mobility Opportunities

Over the past ten years, participants from more than 40 countries have had the opportunity to travel to a university abroad and take part in its study programme. It should be noted that some of the students come from the above-mentioned partner universities. Thus, the Adult Education Academy was conceived within a network of partners from different countries, which underlines its international orientation. The Academy can be seen as an opportunity for study mobility in a physical sense for students and practitioners – for many of them even the first international study mobility (see fig. 1).

³ Austria, Bangladesh, Belarus, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Colombia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Egypt, Estonia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Italy, (South) Korea, Latvia, Malaysia, Moldova, Morocco, Nigeria, Norway, Palestine, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, USA.

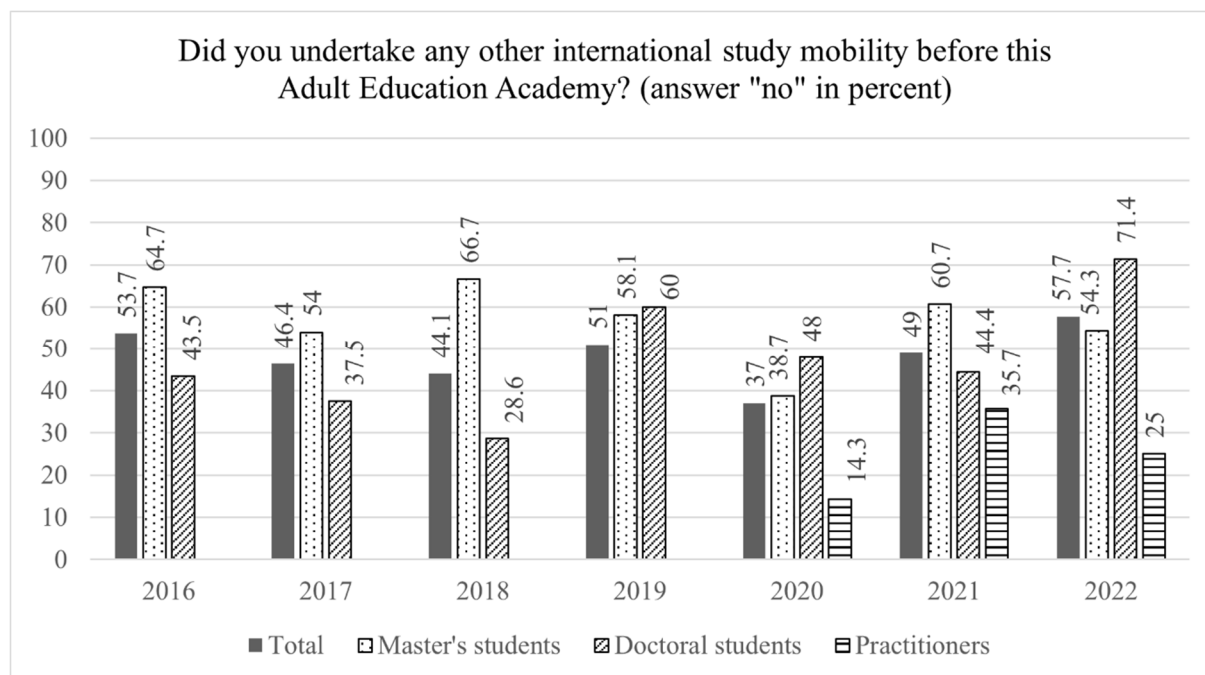


Fig. 1 Did you undertake any other international study mobilities before this Adult Education Academy? (answer “no” in percent) (source: authors’ own)

Between 37% (2020) and 57.7% (2022) of the participants had not undertaken any international study mobility before their attendance in the Adult Education Academy. Differences can be observed between the subgroups. For master’s students the range is between 38.7% in 2020 and 66.7% in 2018, and for doctoral students between 28.6% in 2018 and 71.4% in 2022. In comparison with the students, practitioners have the lowest numbers with 14.3% in 2020 and 35.7% in 2021.

The differences between the numbers of master’s students and doctoral students could be attributed to the fact that doctoral students have a higher number of years of study and therefore have had more opportunities to participate in international study mobilities, such as other international programmes, conferences, or a semester and internship abroad. The low numbers of the practitioners, who in comparison to the master’s and doctoral students most often have already undertaken another international study mobility before joining the Adult Education Academy, could be explained by the increased opportunities that arise in addition to their studies through their own job. Thus, mostly practitioners affiliated to DVV and EAEA participate in the Academy. Both organisations have international partnerships that can go hand in hand with international study mobility opportunities.

Another conspicuousness is that the figures first fell in 2020 and have risen since 2021. One reason for the rise could be found in the COVID-19-pandemic, which might have led to a decrease in international student learning programmes due to travel and contact restrictions. This may lead to the assumption that for a growing number of participants, the Adult Education Academy was their first international study mobility.

With regard to international study mobility, students were also asked to what extent the participation in the programme had increased their motivation to participate in other international mobility activities as part of their studies (see fig. 2).

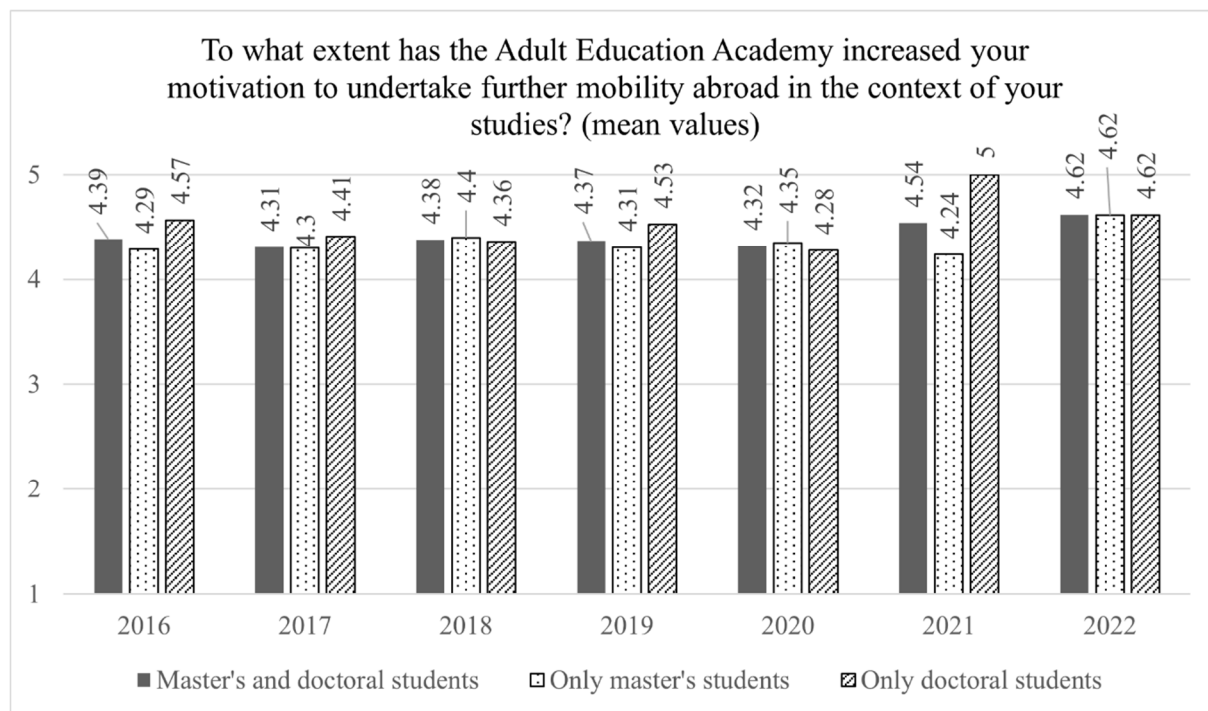


Fig. 2 To what extent has the Adult Education Academy increased your motivation to undertake further mobilities abroad in the context of your studies? – mean values (source: authors' own)

It is evident from the data that there is little difference between the two groups – master's and doctoral students. Furthermore, it can be seen that the mean values are consistently above 4, which may indicate that participants estimate that the Adult Education Academy highly motivates them to undertake further international study mobilities abroad. From this, it can be concluded that the programme is not only a possibility for one single international study mobility, but also contributes to the participation in further mobilities, which can support the internationalisation in the field.

One important possibility of travelling to international universities is the exchange with people from other countries. In this context, the data show that according to the participants' assessment, their own competencies for interacting with people from other cultural backgrounds have increased (see fig. 3).

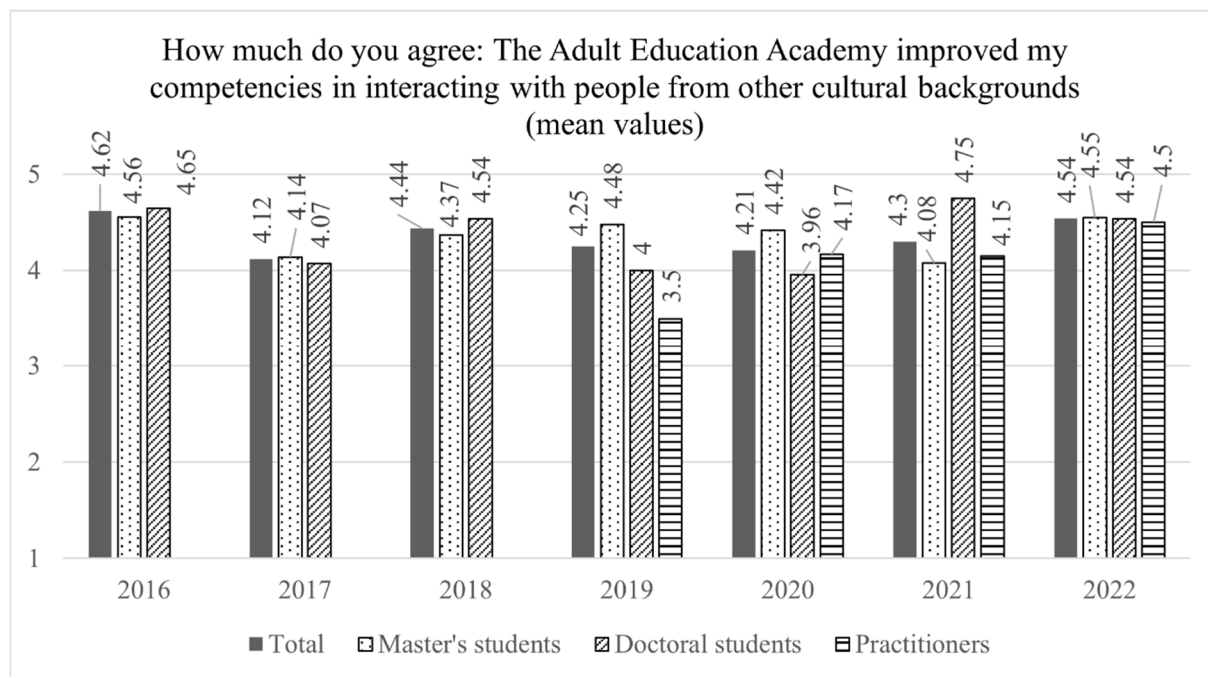


Fig. 3 How much do you agree: The Adult Education Academy improved my competencies in interacting with people from other cultural backgrounds – mean values (source: authors' own)

Regarding the improvement of competencies in dealing with people from other cultural backgrounds, the mean scores vary from 3.5, reported by practitioners in 2019, to 4.75, reported by doctoral students in 2021. Keeping the limited number of answers in mind, the data indicate that there are not only differences between years, but also between groups of participants.

The low mean values (3.5) of the practitioners in 2019 can be explained with their participation possibilities in the programme. In 2019, practitioners had only participated in the second week of the Adult Education Academy. Since 2020, they have participated in both weeks. Moreover, communication with practitioners and their practice sites has intensified over the years, potentially giving them a better connection, both to other participants and to the content of the programme. Both of these points may be reasons why an intensive interaction with people from other cultural backgrounds and therefore better competencies in doing so could not occur, particularly in 2019. At the same time, it can be assumed that the practitioners associated with DVV and EAEA already come into contact with people from different cultural backgrounds as part of their work, which is why they do not perceive any increase.

The other striking value with regard to this question arose in 2021 among the group of doctoral students. Noticeably, the highest value for improved competencies in interacting with people from other cultural backgrounds occurred in the year when the Adult Education Academy was held for the first time in an online-only setting, due to COVID-19-pandemic. This can indicate that improving competencies by intercultural exchange can potentially happen face-to-face as well as virtually. It should also be stressed that despite the change in format from face-to-face to virtual, participants were asked in the evaluation about their participation in other international study mobilities. The concept of mobility has been retained because in this article mobility is not understood as being linked to travel, but to the activity itself. The COVID-19 pandemic can be seen as impetus to rethink the concept of mobility and detach it from travel. This can be attributed to the fact that the pandemic has resulted in numerous virtual conferences, meetings, and programmes with participants from all over the world, which continue to enable international exchange. Based on the results, it can cautiously be deduced that mobility may be rethought through COVID-19 and digitalisation, which may result in the need to rethink the design of international study programmes as well.

4.3 Support of International Understanding of Adult and Lifelong Learning

Based on the understanding that adult and lifelong learning is to be understood internationally and not nationally, it can be considered important to provide participants with an international understanding of adult and lifelong learning. The evaluation results show that the Adult Education Academy contributes to a better understanding of adult and lifelong learning in other countries (see fig. 4).

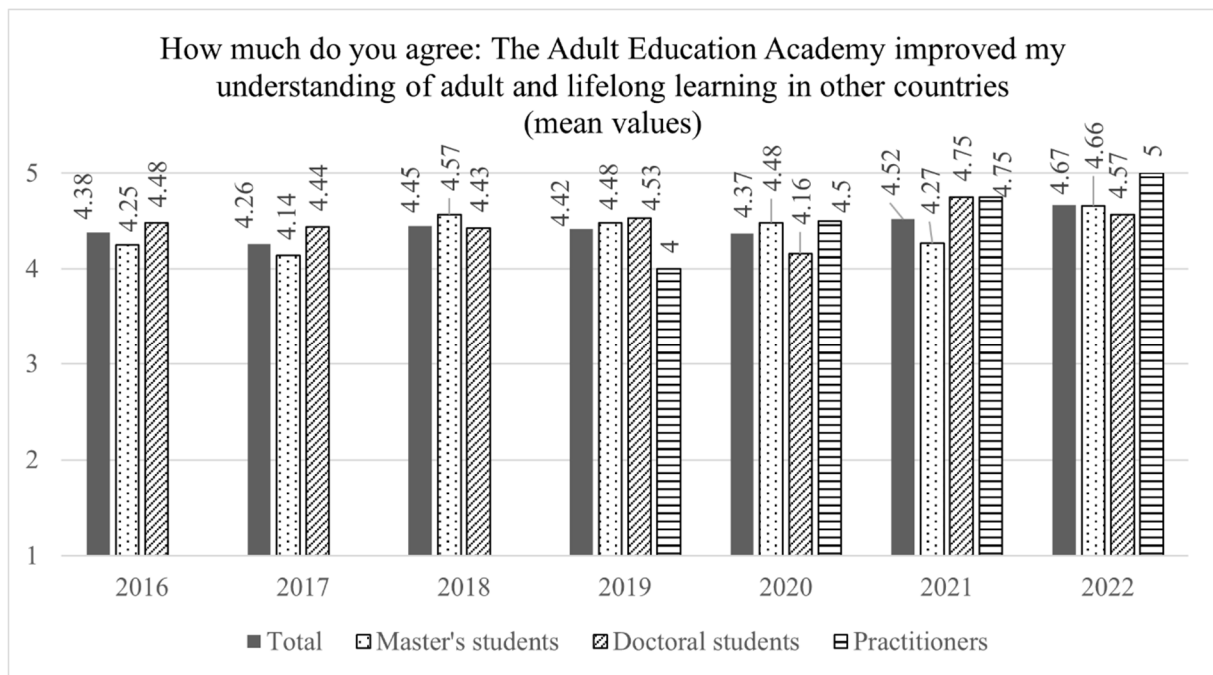


Fig. 4 How much do you agree: The Adult Education Academy improved my understanding of adult and lifelong learning in other countries – mean values (source: authors' own)

The highest range can be observed between 4.14, indicated by master's students in 2017, and 5.00, indicated by practitioners in 2022. Again, master's students showed a lower score (4.27) in 2021 than practitioners and doctoral students. However, the differences are only slight. A further look at the free-text-responses show that this item was an important aspect of what participants learned during the Adult Education Academy. Thus, the different perspectives that were shown during this event, as well as the differences and similarities of different countries, were emphasised several times. The following quotes can be brought in connection with the mean values: "Learned a lot about public policies from my country and from others, I did not know anything about UNESCO or the policies in the European countries. I enjoyed this very much and the perspective I got" or "different/new perspectives on the own and other countries". The evaluation results suggest that the programme can contribute to a better understanding of adult and lifelong learning in other countries, from which it can be deduced that the understanding of adult and lifelong learning in general is also increasing. In relation to this, the evaluation results show an increase in the interest in adult education and lifelong learning (see fig. 5).

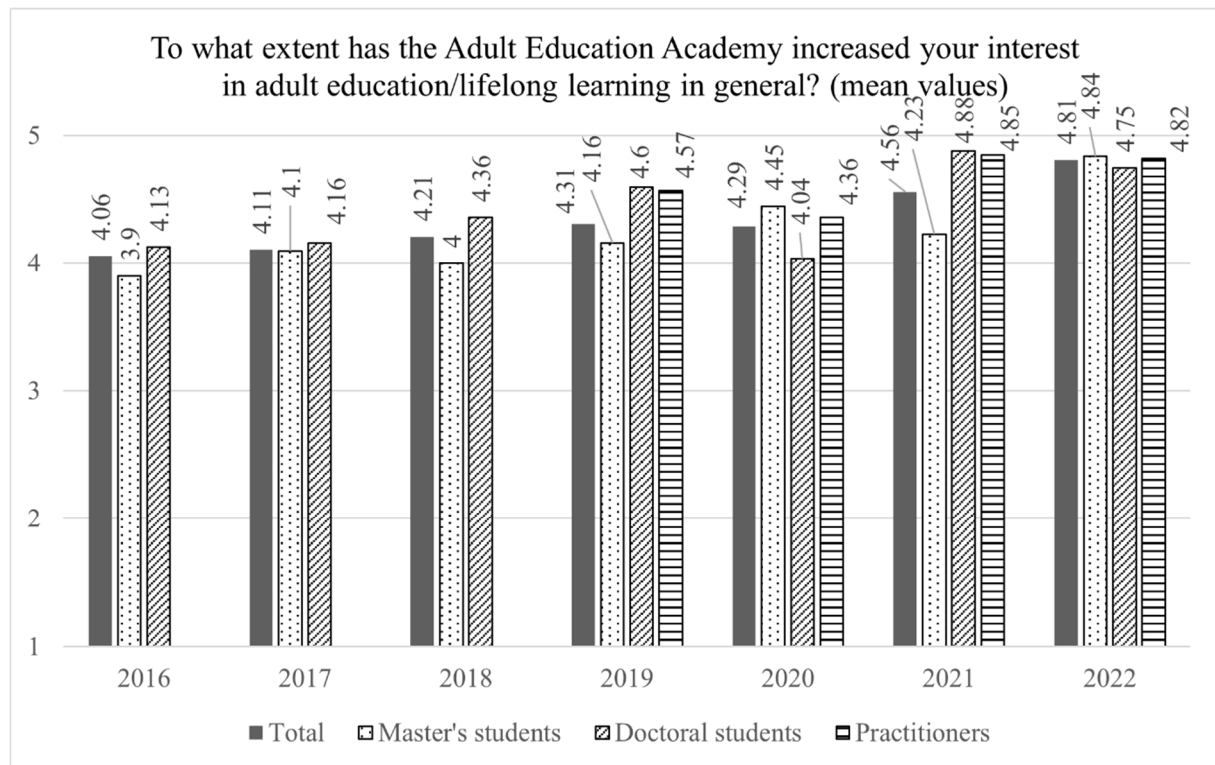


Fig. 5 To what extent has the Adult Education Academy increased your interest in adult education/lifelong learning in general? – mean values (source: authors' own)

Starting with a mean of 4.06 in 2016 and increasing to a mean of 4.81 by 2022 may indicate that the interest in adult education and lifelong learning has generally increased after the participation in the Adult Education Academy within the last years among master's and doctoral students, but also practitioners. The results show an increase over the years, with only few differences between master's students, doctoral students and practitioners. The numbers support the assumption that dealing with other countries cannot only improve the understanding of other countries, but also of its own country. This assumption is derived from the view that the new and unknown can promote a person's learning process, but also that questions in the field of adult and lifelong learning should mainly be understood in an international context. Furthermore, the evaluation results show that the Adult Education Academy, and thus the participants' exposure to international aspects of adult education, contributes to their motivation to further engage with these aspects as part of their own studies (see fig. 6).

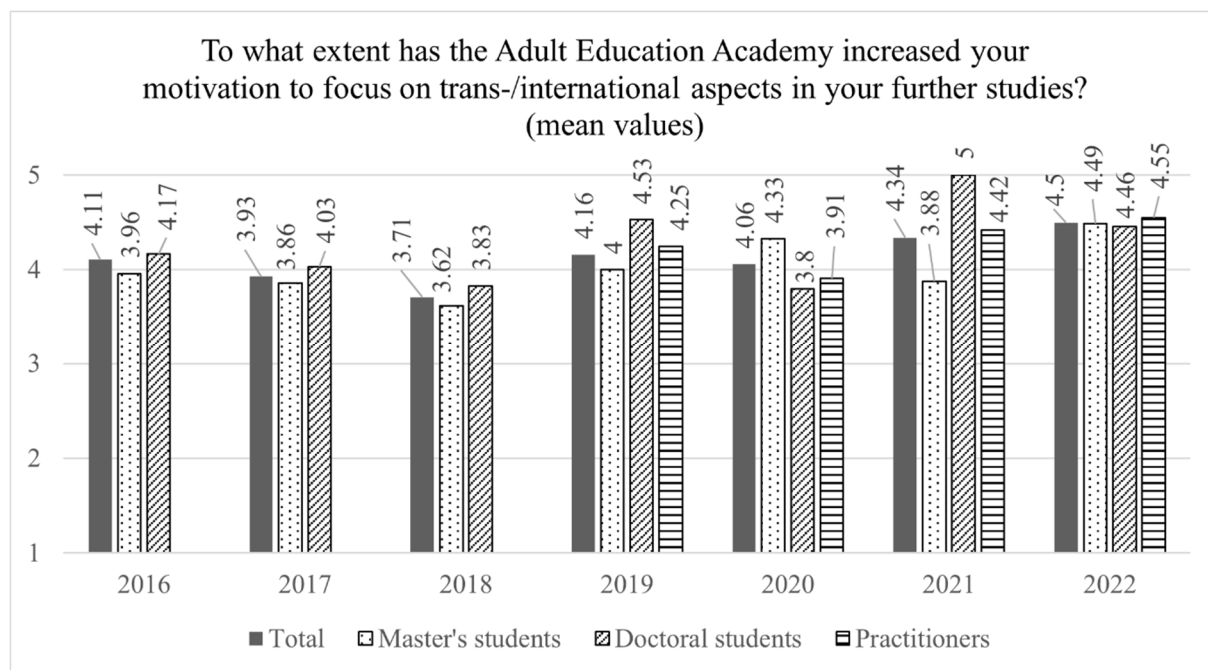


Fig. 6 To what extent has the Adult Education Academy increased your motivation to focus on trans-/international aspects in your further studies? – mean values (source: authors' own)

The increase in motivation in all groups from 2018, with a total mean of 3.71, to 4.16 in 2019 could be explained by the introduction of practitioners to the Academy. The exchange with them, but also the presentation of their daily work could have contributed to the fact that the participants would like to deal more with these topics within their studies in the future. Similar figures are shown with regard to the professional future (see fig. 7).

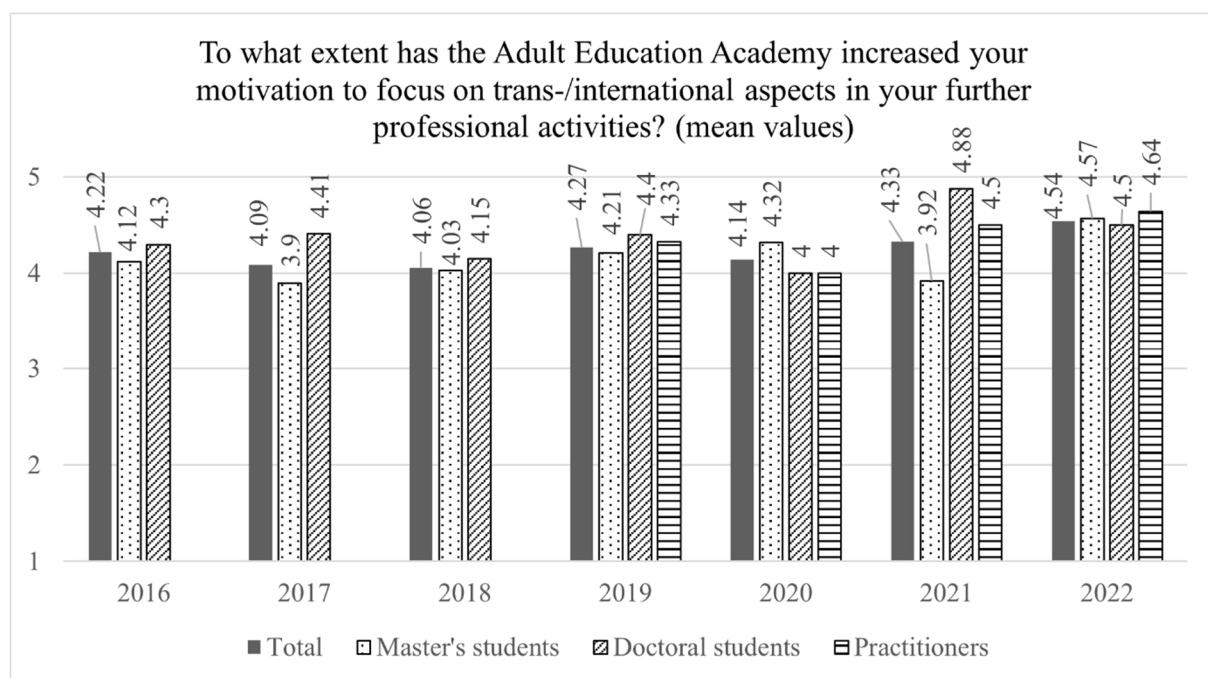


Fig. 7 To what extent has the Adult Education Academy increased your motivation to focus on trans-/international aspects in your further studies? – mean values (source: authors' own)

The mean scores for all groups also show an increase from 2019, which again could be related to the participation of practitioners. In addition, the implementation of the “employability day”⁴ could be beneficial in terms of motivation to deal with trans-/international topics in future professional activities. This assumption could be also reflected in free-text-responses from participants in 2020 to the question of what they liked most about the Academy. Thus, they speak of “enriching contribution of practitioners or practitioners’ life stories”.

Based on the data, it can be assumed that the Adult Education Academy contributes to an increase in motivation regarding further engagement with adult and lifelong learning from an international perspective, to which the involvement of practitioners may have contributed. This, again, can show that the Academy should not be understood as a one-time mobility, but as possibility of internationalisation. It can be assumed that it will be beneficial for the internationalisation of the field of adult and lifelong learning in higher education, if students continue to engage with aspects of the internationalisation of the field in the future. Beyond their own studies, there is an interest in dealing with international aspects in the world of work. It can be cautiously assumed that the participants can apply the contents and competences learned and deepened in the Adult Education Academy in their (future) work. An expansion of academic knowledge, which is understood as the basis for professional action, can be achieved.

5 Conclusion

It can be concluded that the Adult Education Academy is an international study opportunity which contributes to the internationalisation of adult education as an academic discipline. The contribution of the programme is shown in both: In the development of the Academy since 2014 and in the selected evaluation results.

With regard to the empirical data, the size and the specific nature of the sample, some limitations should be pointed out. Firstly, there is the assumption that the participants of the Adult Education Academy already have an affinity and a special interest in the international field of adult education and lifelong learning. Secondly, it can also be concluded that financial resources play a crucial role if the entire trip and stay cannot be funded by the coordinator, especially for non-European students, for whom extra costs arise in obtaining visas. These aspects should be considered when presenting the results. In this context, it can be pointed out that the programme involves, to a large extent, students and practitioners from partner universities and organisations. It can therefore be cautiously assumed that access to an international study programme is facilitated by a partnership, which can also be accompanied by financial support. Lastly, there is the assumption that in particular people are reached who have an international openness and a strong command of the English language. The latter is also a criterion for participation.

Against this backdrop and the contextualisation of the data, it can be seen that the Adult Education Academy is an international study programme developed within the framework of an international partnership and for which module structures have been developed. Thereby, participants are enrolled at the University of Würzburg and given the opportunity to earn ECTS at their home universities, which contributes to the internationalisation of education and training programmes at the partner universities. Professors, students and practitioners from around the world come together in Würzburg, or virtually, to participate in the programme. With a focus on adult and lifelong learning as well as on comparative education, a programme was developed in which participants expand and reflect on their own (academic) knowledge. Transferring this

⁴ In 2019 and 2020, an “Employability Day” was conducted during the second week of the Adult Education Academy. Within a given theoretical framework, participants were guided to reflect on their own employability skills and to use students’ portfolios to present their own skills in combination with the international labour market. In addition, students were able to listen to the professional careers of participating practitioners to gain insight into real-world experiences. Starting in 2021, the topic “employability” is part of the preparation phase.

into practice is supported by intensive exchange with practitioners and by exploring practice institutions. Furthermore, the learning process of the adult educators in this study programme is framed by providing an analytical tool for analysing international educational policies. Regarding the connection between theory and practice, it can be added that the exchange between students and practitioners can be seen as valuable. On the one hand, it can strengthen the partnership between universities and practice organisations, and on the other hand it can enable the expansion of the international understanding of adult education. This can help to work on overcoming the gap between theory and practice, which is seen as a fundamental issue in academic professionalisation (Schüßler / Egetenmeyer 2018). This is particularly necessary in light of societal challenges, such as the COVID-19-pandemic, which may be associated with changes in exchange.

With recourse to the Marrakech Framework, an increased need for strategies for the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies as well as the development and implementation of learning strategies is assumed. The aim is to provide support in coping with the demands associated with the crisis. In this context, the Framework refers to the influence of technologies, which can go hand in hand with the need to train and build digital competencies. In relation to this, it is possible to refer to the evaluation data. The COVID-19 pandemic can be understood as an occasion to rethink the understanding of mobility. This can mean that exchange through mobility does not necessarily involve travel. The mean scores for motivation and competencies for the two virtual Adult Education Academies in 2021 and 2022 only show little difference from the face-to-face Academies in previous years. On the other hand, the virtual implementations show that the possession of digital competencies can be a necessary prerequisite for participation. However, missing competencies can be improved through good preparation, for example, and participants can be made familiar with the tools and platforms used. The central role of preparation can also be inferred from the participant composition of the Adult Education Academy. It should be noted that the three participant groups have different levels of experience, prior knowledge, and expectations of participation. In order to enable an exchange and discussion on the same level during the Adult Education Academy, a structured preparation can be considered important.

For the academic field of adult education, it can be deduced from this that changes in the requirements for adult educators can arise, especially against the background of developments taking place in society, which at the same time can go hand in hand with changing requirements for academic professionalisation with regard to internationalisation.

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