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**"STUDY ABROAD AND CAREER: THE IMPACT OF  
INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES ON GRADUATES'  
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT"**

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# INTRODUCTION

International mobility has become an issue of growing interest over the last years. Globalization indeed is changing the society we live in, increasingly leading companies to expand out of national borders and workers to deal with an international dimension in their jobs. This topic has important implications not only for the labour market, but also for the higher education sector which has to provide young people with the right set of competencies to succeed in a global business environment: for example, recent research shows that intercultural skills, adaptability, communication and relational capabilities, and foreign language fluency have become fundamental requirements for graduates nowadays. To achieve this goal, universities are paying increasing attention to internationalize their educational offer and student mobility programs play a role of paramount importance in this sense.

According to these considerations, in the present research we decided to investigate the impacts of study abroad experiences on graduates' professional development, in particular analysing whether and how different characteristics of the programs influence (i) the degree of career internationalization, and (ii) the extent to which students gain valuable skills in the marketplace. This work is structured as follows.

Chapter One introduces the topic that represents the background of our research, by exploring the main current trends in the global labour market and in student mobility. After explaining how these two issues are intertwined, insights on internationalization of higher education in Italy and European Union are provided with data about young people's participation in learning abroad activities.

Subsequently, Chapter Two is dedicated to the analysis of the effects of student mobility, with a comprehensive review of the existing literature on this topic. Research has rapidly expanded in recent years, covering a wide variety of outcomes that can be summarized into three main areas: skills acquisition, career development, personal growth.

The dissertation continues then by presenting, in Chapter Three, the general framework and the structure of the empirical investigation. First, contributions to the literature are underlined with a focus on how the present study differentiates from previous works on learning abroad outcomes; second, the research question is outlined and the analytical models to address it are

offered. Afterwards, the methodology used to design the research and to collect data is described: our study, indeed, was conducted on a sample of business graduates of the University of Padova by means of a questionnaire we developed in order to gather all the necessary information.

Finally, in Chapter Four the empirical models are tested with two types of statistical procedures: first linear regression is performed to understand the main kind of relationship that exists among the variables, and then simple and multiple mediation are applied to enrich the analysis and add more precise considerations on the effects of study abroad on career internationalization. After examining the results obtained, implications of the present research for organizations and higher education institutions are discussed in the end.

## **STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS AND GLOBAL LABOUR MARKET MOBILITY**

This chapter will start by introducing the topic of internationalization of higher education, in which student mobility plays an important role, being the most popular approach adopted by institutions. Then, the analysis will focus on how international student mobility integrates into the broader framework of global mobility in the labour market. These two topics seem to be highly related, since today's fast changing and globalised work environment requires international and intercultural competences to graduates. Therefore, current labour market trends will be examined, highlighting especially people's preferences and attitudes toward mobility.

Subsequently, the chapter will provide an overview of the Italian trends about study abroad experiences. The most popular mobility programme is definitely the Erasmus, to which Italy participates along with all Member States of EU. Given the importance of this Programme in promoting the internationalization of higher education systems and in strengthening the skills of individuals, it seems useful to address its most relevant aspects and to show the latest key figures about European students' mobility.

### **1.1 Internationalization of higher education and global mobility in the labour market: relationship and trends**

International mobility is a very current topic, concerning both higher education and the labour market. Globalization has completely transformed society and has melted boundaries across countries, leading to an increasingly connected world. Economies are becoming more and more integrated and businesses are facing many challenges to succeed in a global and extremely dynamic marketplace. Only to make some examples, nowadays companies often have to deal with international suppliers and customers, and locating value chain activities abroad to reduce costs or to be closer to customers is becoming very important in order to sustain competitive advantage. Globalization is changing also the way people work: employees have to interact with individuals from different backgrounds, work in intercultural teams, undertake international assignments, travel frequently and even relocate abroad for job purposes. The

main labour trends connected to global mobility will be analysed further in this section. As a consequence of this ever-changing external environment, employers are looking for workers with the adequate skillset to be effective in an international context: cross-cultural competences, foreign languages fluency and the ability to adapt to new and unexpected situations are examples of top-valued skills in today's labour market.

### 1.1.1 Internationalization in higher education institutions: approaches and motivations

To prepare students to enter a global marketplace and to equip them with the right competences to succeed, universities are paying increasing attention to gaining an international dimension. Indeed, the accelerating rate of globalization is having major impacts also on the strategies, activities and policies adopted by higher education institutions. It is worth saying that, in the context we are considering now, globalization and internationalization are different concepts although they are often used in interchangeable ways. For Altbach and Knight (2007), globalization is “the economic, political, and societal forces pushing 21st century higher education toward greater international involvement”. On the other hand, they define internationalization as a phenomenon that includes “the policies and practices undertaken by academic systems and institutions—and even individuals—to cope with the global academic environment” (Altbach and Knight, 2007). Therefore, the two concepts are distinct but very related one to the other. The internationalization process of higher education systems is a broad topic that covers several aspects both at the national and at the institutional level and the range of international activities performed by universities is continuously broadening. However, two streams of initiatives at the institutional level can be identified (Knight, 2004):

- internationalization at home: it includes all the activities that allow students to experience an international dimension and acquire intercultural skills without leaving their home country. Some examples are: the integration of intercultural and international aspects in curricula, teaching, research and extracurricular activities; the promotion of relationships with local cultural and ethnic community groups (Knight, 2004, and Wächter, 2003)
- internationalization abroad, or cross-border education: it requires that students, teachers, educational programmes or institutions cross the national borders. It can take many different forms: students or teachers' mobility, partnerships with foreign institutions to deliver joint programmes and courses, transnational e-learning courses, the opening of university branches abroad, etc. (OECD, 2004).

Hence, student mobility is only a particular form of internationalization activity; however, it remains the most important and common and it represents a growing phenomenon involving always new countries and institutions all around the world.

Traditionally, reasons why academic institutions decide to pursue an internationalization strategy are grouped into four categories (de Wit, 2002): political (e.g. foreign policy), economic (e.g. financial incentives, competitiveness), social/cultural (e.g. intercultural understanding, social development), and academic (e.g. providing an international dimension to research and teaching, status, enhancement of quality). Along with these rationales, new motivations are emerging (Knight, 2004) and the most important one appears to be the development of relevant skills for students and staff, that enable them to work in a culturally varied and fast-changing environment. Also more recent studies (Hénard et al., 2012) emphasize that the main reason why institutions should consider to internationalize is to provide students with intercultural competences and increase their global awareness, in order to prepare them to the current conditions of the labour market. As previously said, student mobility programmes are one of the best ways to build the skills required by today's marketplace.

### 1.1.2 Global mobility trends

As a matter of fact, today's world of work is becoming increasingly characterized by cultural diversity and global mobility, and employers have to face new challenges in recruiting personnel with the needed capabilities and attitudes. What follows is a picture of the main trends concerning labour market and workforce dynamics, that companies need to consider to be successful in our globalized era.

A survey by Deloitte (2018) on Human Capital Trends, based on data from over 11 000 businesses and HR departments across 124 countries, reports that for the 68% of the organizations global mobile human resources are strategically important to develop and sustain competitive advantage. In order to create a skilled, dynamic and top-talented workforce on which to build the company's future, it is now necessary to consider the international marketplace. Organizations are now competing for talent on a global scale, searching for people with key professional skills also in emerging countries, and they are increasingly recruiting, managing and moving human resources all over the world. Global mobility is creating new challenges and opportunities for today's companies: therefore, it seems useful to examine more in depth this growing phenomenon by looking at three main trends (Deloitte, 2018).

- Trend 1: diversification of global mobility

Today, workforce mobility is characterized by a broadening variety of policy types and of locations. For what regards mobility approaches, if at the end of the last century companies mainly distinguished between short-term and long-term assignments, nowadays more flexible and modern options are available, such as business trips, commuter assignments and immersive experiences. Looking at the three top growth policies in 2018, we can say that traditional mobility types are still the most popular among firms' choices, but new policies continue to gain importance as well: 46% companies deployed one-way assignments, 43% used more short-term assignments but 33% relied on increased business travel. Mobility locations' trends are changing too: while in past years transfers between developed countries were the rule, more recently also developing countries were involved as destinations for assignments. This has led to the current tendency of "global" mobility, whereby transfers of the workforce happen in an international setting.

- Trend 2: humanisation of global mobility

Nowadays, one of the key priorities for employers is to design human-centric mobility programmes that can truly address the needs of the employees and provide them with a meaningful personal experience. According to Deloitte (2018), mobility should not be viewed only as a compensation incentive, but also as a "benefit enabler" and a "relationship engager". Indeed, "humanised" mobility experiences bring about important personal and professional effects to employees, foster their engagement and are useful to build a positive relationship between them and the company. This trend requires HR departments to focus on four particular aspects in the planning and management of global mobility policies: they need to ensure operational support, deliver personal wellbeing, address employees' professional engagement and provide financial welfare.

- Trend 3: digitalisation of global mobility

New technologies allow companies to deploy innovative methods to deal with the growing complexity and extent of mobility data, and to embed digital processes in the management of the global workforce.

Given that the future of workforce is represented by global mobility, understanding people's preferences and attitudes toward this trend is important as well. A survey by Boston Consulting Group (2018), involving over 366 000 respondents from 197 countries in the world, investigated what is changing about the willingness to work abroad, the motivations to do so and the preferred destinations. One of the most relevant findings is that the desire to relocate for

work is declining from 2014 (year of BCG previous survey): 57% of participants in 2018 said that they would consider to move in a foreign country for job purposes, compared to 64% in 2014. Most countries involved in the survey showed a decrease of more than 10% with respect to 2014 results: among them there are China and several central and eastern European countries, whose workforce is not very interested in mobility (less than 50% of respondents would relocate). This is probably due to the improvement of national economies, which allows workers to find a satisfying job without having necessarily to move abroad. Italy is characterized by a stable situation since 2014, with a percentage of people willing to work abroad between 50% and 60%, together with other European countries such as Spain, Austria, Belgium and Denmark. US and Germany show this same range of percentages (50%-60%) but also a countertrend in the desire to work abroad, which increased by more than 10% since 2014. Willingness to emigrate is the highest in India, Venezuela and in Middle East countries (Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt), with a share that goes above 90% of the participants interviewed.

Survey's findings show that reasons for mobility are various and change according to countries' political stability. On one side, for respondents coming from less stable countries what matters the most is to achieve better standards of living, followed by finding better career opportunities and enlarging their personal experience. Economic factors like pursuing more adequate salaries and avoiding the economic uncertainty of their home country are among the top motivations as well. On the other hand, for people in politically stable countries personal reasons, such as broadening one's experience and getting to know a different culture, are more important.

Although labour mobility is going to involve a widening number of countries in the future, it is true that some destinations continue to demonstrate their appeal more than others. The following Table 1.1 compares the top ten preferred countries by the global workforce in 2018 and in 2014, according to BCG surveys.

*Table 1.1 – The most attractive countries for global workforce in 2018 and in 2014*

<b>COUNTRIES IN 2018 SURVEY</b> (% of respondents)	<b>RANKING</b>	<b>COUNTRIES IN 2014 SURVEY</b> (% of respondents)
US (34%)	1	US (42%)
Germany (26%)	2	UK (37%)
Canada (24%)	3	Canada (35%)
Australia (21%)	4	Germany (33%)
UK (20%)	5	Switzerland (29%)
Spain (14%)	6	France (29%)
France (14%)	7	Australia (28%)
Switzerland (13%)	8	Spain (26%)
Italy (11%)	9	Italy (25%)
Japan (10%)	10	Sweden (23%)

*[Sources: BCG, 2018 and BCG, 2014]*

United States maintains its first place as the most attractive country for foreign workers, with the 34% of respondents' preferences in 2018, a declining share compared to 2014: the more restrictive policies on trade and immigration pursued by Trump's administration have probably affected these results. The second most popular destination for global workforce is now Germany, which would be chosen by 26% of people and benefits from a strong and growing economy and more open policies for immigrants. Canada follows in the ranking, keeping the third place as in the survey of 2014. UK instead has experienced a steep fall in workers' preferences, which have almost halved since 2014 (37% compared to the current 20%): replaced by Germany as second most appealing country, it is now fifth, probably as a consequence of Brexit. Anyway, for Italian and US respondents UK still remains the most attractive destination of all. The top five positions showed in the 2018 survey do not vary a lot even considering participants' education level: people holding a master's degree, a doctorate or the equivalent rank US, Germany and Canada as the most preferred, followed by UK and Australia.

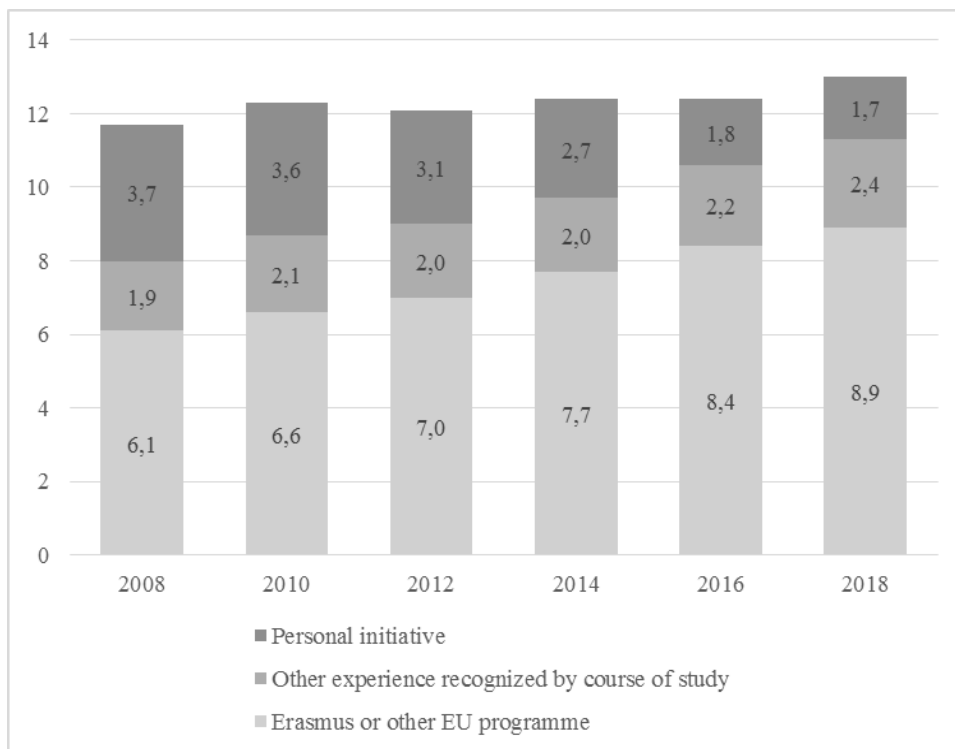
To sum up, global mobility is a phenomenon that is radically transforming the world of work. Young generations will be the most affected, as they represent the future workforce that companies will recruit, manage and develop. For them, international assignments, career opportunities outside their home country and multicultural work environments will be the rule: therefore, in order to prepare students to enter the labour market with the best skillset, educational institutions should focus on internationalisation as an integral part of the learning experience.



## 1.2 International student mobility: evidence from Italy

More and more Italy is recognizing the key differentiating value of study abroad experiences for young adults enrolled in the highest level of education, and universities are increasingly enriching and strengthening their international partnerships in order to provide a wide variety of global opportunities to students. The following graph (Figure 1.1) shows the growth in Italian graduates' participation to international mobility programs: during the last ten years, the share has increased from 11.7% of total graduates in 2008 to 13% in 2018.

Figure 1.1 - Graduates 2008-2018: study abroad experiences (% values)



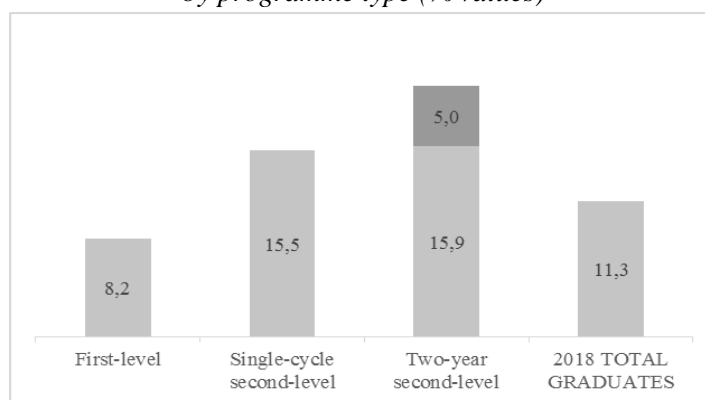
[Source: Almalaurea, 2019a]

The Erasmus Programme is definitely the most popular path to study abroad: since its adoption in 1987, it has allowed thousands of Italian students to spend a period in another European country during their university course and it has been fundamental in order to promote the importance of international mobility. Although the greatest part of students undertaking study abroad experiences participates to Erasmus, other types of international programs recognized by higher education institutions are spreading in recent years (Figure 1.1). Some of them also entail mobility outside EU: this reflects the increasing collaboration of Italian universities with their overseas counterparts, especially United States and Asian countries. The proportion of those studying abroad via personal initiatives is instead declining over time.

In order to analyse the Italian trends in international student mobility, data from the inter-university consortium AlmaLaurea will be considered. Set up in 1994 with the support of the Ministry of Education, AlmaLaurea public consortium now counts 75 Italian universities and collects data of the 91% of Italian graduates. It is widely acknowledged for the completeness and reliability of data provided and it is recognized as an important tool in facilitating the match between qualified work demand and offer. Namely, AlmaLaurea acts as a meeting point for graduates, academic institutions and the business world by conducting every year valuable analysis of several topics: graduates' performances and characteristics, their entry in the labour market and employment conditions. Source of the following data is the most recent survey of Graduates' Profile (AlmaLaurea, 2019a), which gives a complete picture of the educational performance of 280,000 graduates who concluded their studies in 2018.

For what concerns study abroad experiences, the share of Italian graduates who participated to them has reached 13% in 2018, as anticipated before. More in detail, 8.9% was enrolled in European Union programmes (Erasmus above all), while 2.4% had other international experiences recognized by the course of study (Overseas, etc.) and the remaining 1.4% studied abroad via personal initiative (see Figure 1.1). Considering only European programs and other experiences recognized by universities, participation varies according to the degree level. As Figure 1.2 shows, first-level graduates were involved for the 8.2% in such initiatives, while percentages increase a lot for single-cycle graduates (15.5%) and two-year master's graduates. This latest category, in particular, is the most affected because almost 21% of graduates took the opportunity to study abroad in the full university career, either during their master (15.9%) or previously during their first-level programme (5.0%). This result is especially important because it already exceeds the European Union target for the proportion of students in higher education completing a period of training abroad, set at 20% by 2020.

*Figure 1.2 - 2018 Graduates: study abroad recognised by the degree programme, by programme type (% values)*



[Source: AlmaLaurea, 2019a]

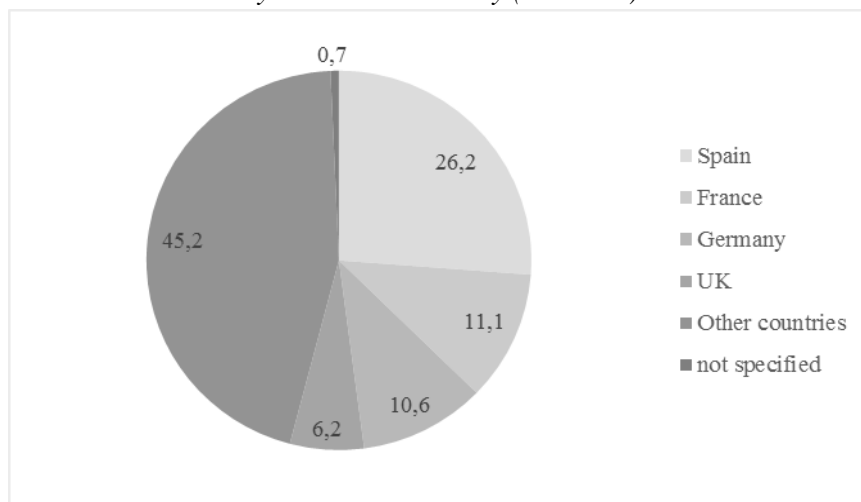
Differences among fields of study are relevant as well. Study abroad experiences recognized by degree programs concern mainly students of foreign languages (30.8%), medicine and dentistry (18.5%) and architecture (16.1%), while the share of economics and statistics' students is reported to be at 12.4%. In addition, the geographical location of the university is an important factor that influences the probability of spending a studying period abroad. According to Almalaurea report, Northern Italy universities have the highest percentages of graduates who participated to a recognized foreign educational program: in the North-East 15.6% of total graduates were mobile during their academic career, and in the North-West the share is slightly lower (11.5%). In Central Italy graduates who studied abroad account for the 10.5% of the total, while Southern Italy universities are the least involved in international exchange programs (only 7.7% of total graduates went abroad for study).

Furthermore, Almalaurea analyses the family background of internationally mobile graduates, stating that more favourable social and economic conditions lead to a higher probability to study abroad. As a matter of fact, the majority of graduates who undertook such experiences comes from families with a high social status (14.9%) while those coming from less favoured social contexts had less opportunities to participate (8.3%). The level of education of parents is another important factor: 18.0% of 2018 graduates with a recognized study abroad experience has both parents holding a university degree, while only the 9.5% has both parents with lower education levels.

Study abroad programs give participants the opportunity to undertake different learning experiences in a foreign country: students can attend courses and take the relative exams and also they can decide to prepare their thesis while abroad. During their stay, 80.0% of 2018 graduates took exams which were then recognized by their course of study (a share that goes up to 89.7% for first-level graduates) and 27,8% reported that they used the experience to write their thesis (this percentage increases to 46.3% for two-year master graduates).

In conclusion, as far as foreign destinations of recognized programs are concerned, the most popular country is Spain, which hosted the 26.2% of total graduates, followed by France (11.1%), Germany (10.6%) and United Kingdom (6.2%). The rest of the graduates chose other countries, both in the European Union (such as Portugal, 4.8%, or Poland, 3.8%) and outside it: for example, 2.8% travelled to China for purposes of studying and who moved to United States is the 2.5% of the total. Figure 1.3 shows graduates' distribution by country of destination.

Figure 1.3 - 2018 Graduates: study abroad recognised by the degree programme by destination country (% values)

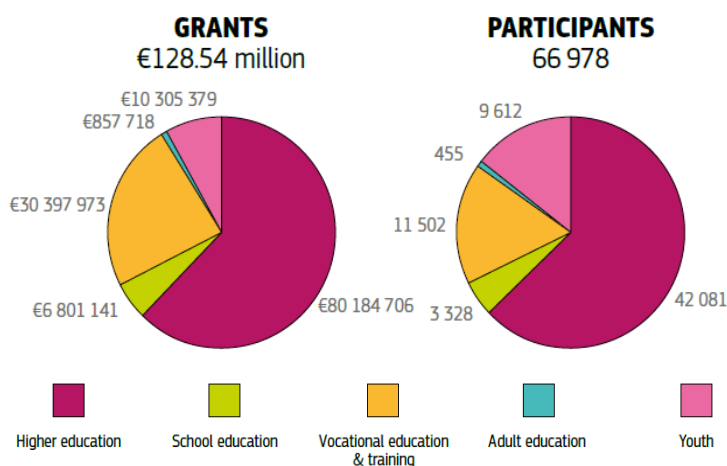


[Source: Almalaurea, 2019a]

The clear predominance of European countries as destinations is due to the high popularity of Erasmus Programme, which remains the most common mobility opportunity for Italian students: according to Almalaurea findings, 98.8% of 2018 graduates who studied abroad through a European initiative participated to Erasmus. Since the launch of Erasmus in 1987, Italy has contributed by 10% to the overall number of participants going abroad for study reasons, positioning itself among the countries with the highest level of engagement in the Programme (Indire, 2017).

European Commission reports that, in 2017, 66 978 people in Italy benefited from Erasmus mobility, for a total grant amount of €128.54 million (Figure 1.4). More than 60% of participants and of funding were linked to higher education projects, while the remainder was involved in initiatives for school education, training, adult education and youth.

Figure 1.4 – Grant amount and number of participants to Erasmus+ 2017 in Italy by sector



[Source: European Commission, 2018b]

With regard to higher education in Italy, the number of outgoing students and trainees has increased a lot from 21 039 in 2009/2010 to 35 666 in 2016/2017, and the number of incoming people has risen as well (from 18 137 in 2009/2010 to 26 294 in 2016/2017). According to the 2017 European Commission report, the top sending institution in Italy was University of Bologna, followed by University of Padova and Sapienza University of Rome. The top three preferred destinations by Italian students were Spain, France and Germany, coherently with AlmaLaurea's more recent findings.

The role of Erasmus in promoting international mobility in Italy is undeniable, as confirmed by the National report on the implementation and impact of the Erasmus+ programme (European Commission, 2017a). The document underlines the Programme's importance in enhancing young people's competences (in particular the knowledge of foreign languages, relational and intercultural skills) and enriching individuals' professional curriculum with a strongly qualifying experience. Another important benefit is the promotion of European citizenship: Erasmus represents for sure an example of success in European integration and it fuels the consolidation of values such as tolerance, freedom and openness among people coming from different cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, the value of the Programme for Italy is reflected in the opportunity for innovation of the higher education system, whose modernization and internationalization is made possible by the cooperation of the institutions with other national and European counterparts. International partnerships are fundamental for the quality improvement of Italian academic system, as they allow to exchange good practices and to transfer innovative educational methods, curricula and courses.

Although further interventions in our country are needed in order to achieve European objectives and to improve the efficacy of the Programme, it remains unquestionable that Erasmus has been pivotal in providing new opportunities to Italian students for enriching their personal background through the acquisition of skills and the participation to innovative learning experiences.

### **1.3 Student mobility in the European Union: the importance of Erasmus+**

Europe 2020 strategy for growth, defined in 2010 by the Member States with a Communication from the Commission (COM(2010) 2020 final, 3.3.2010), is the program for economic recovery after the financial crisis that suggests a series of reforms in order to support job creation and a to improve the competitiveness and the productivity of European economy. In this context, higher education is seen as having a fundamental role for EU growth, and learning

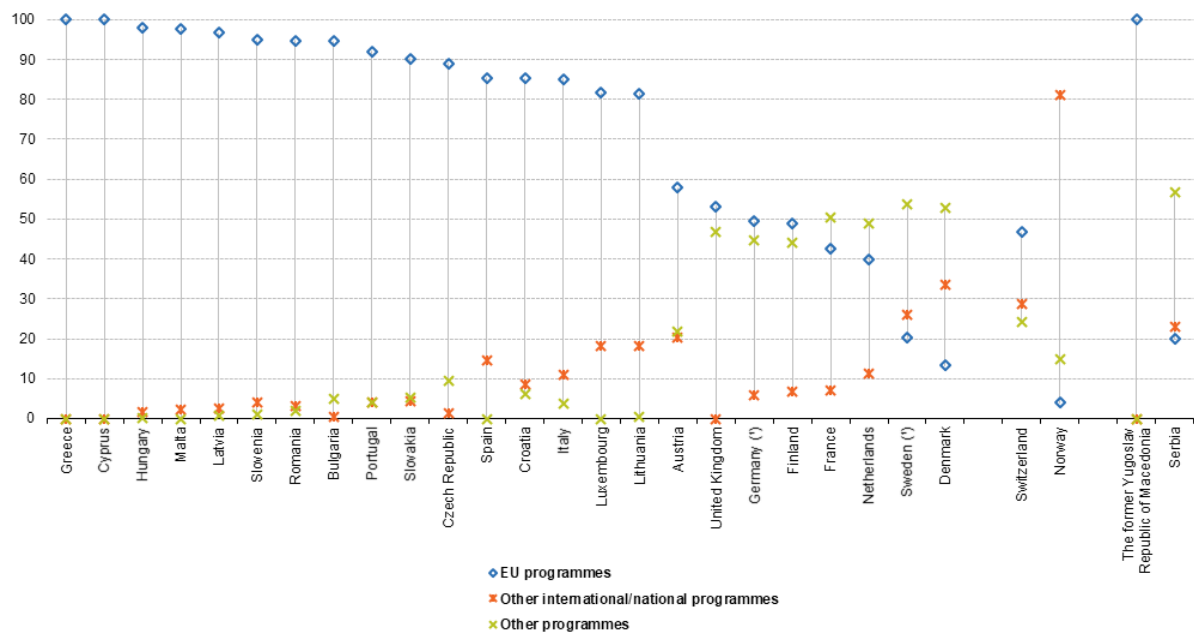
mobility for young people is one of the key priorities in the agenda because it enhances individuals' skills, their knowledge and cultural awareness and it boosts their employability prospects. In particular, as stated from the Council in November 2011 in the agenda for the modernization of higher education, EU countries have agreed to increase the target of number of students completing a period of study or training abroad up to 20% by 2020. For this purpose, they have recommended actions in order to promote cross-border cooperation among EU higher education institutions and to enhance mobility by ensuring a common system for the recognition of academic credits.

Two types of learning mobility at tertiary level education can be identified: degree mobility and credit mobility (Sanchez Barrioluengo and Flisi, 2017). The first entails the enrolment in a degree programme of a foreign country and therefore implies that the student takes the greatest majority of the courses abroad, spending almost all the time there. The focus of our analysis will be instead on credit mobility, category to which study abroad programs belong. Namely, credit mobility is defined as the “temporary tertiary education and/or study-related traineeship abroad within the framework of enrolment in a tertiary education programme at a ‘home institution’ (usually) for the purpose of gaining academic credit (i.e. credit that will be recognised by that home institution)” (Sanchez Barrioluengo and Flisi, 2017).

Eurostat provides recent statistics on many areas of education and training in EU countries, including learning mobility of tertiary education students. Considering data on credit mobile graduates of EU countries who spent at least three months abroad for a study or training period, at Bachelor's or equivalent level, Figure 1.5 points out the participation to different types of programmes. EU programmes include initiatives by the European Union, such as Erasmus+; other international/national programmes consist in bi- or multilateral programmes (such as partnerships between universities); other programmes concern students who organise their mobility which is then recognized by their own universities (Eurostat). As it turns out, in almost all countries the majority of graduates undertook a EU mobility programme (thus, Erasmus in first place), with Greece, Cyprus and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia that achieve a share of 100%. Italy shows a high percentage of graduates who participated to EU programmes as well, above 80%, while other international/national programmes are chosen by only the 10% of individuals. In other countries such as United Kingdom, Germany and Finland, the participation to EU programmes is just around 50% and very similar shares of other programmes are recorded (around 45%). In France and Netherlands the share of graduates who participated to mobility initiatives organized by the EU is lower than for the other

types of programmes, and in the particular cases of Sweden and Denmark it is just around 20% or even lower.

Figure 1.5 - Analysis by type of mobility scheme of credit mobile graduates, 2016



Note: Belgium, Estonia, Ireland and Poland, not available. Ranked on EU programmes.  
 (\*) Does not cover graduates that are simultaneously credit and degree mobile.

[Source: Eurostat]

Despite some variability across countries, depending probably on the level of modernization and internationalization of national higher education systems, EU programmes remain the most popular path for completing a period of study or training abroad.

EU’s flagship programme for mobility is referred to as Erasmus+ and was adopted in December 2013 to replace and integrate several previously existing learning programs. It is aimed at supporting and strengthening education, training, youth and sport in Europe and it is set to last from 2014 to 2020. Therefore, it contributes to the above-mentioned Europe 2020 strategy for growth, jobs, social equity and inclusion, along with participating to the EU's strategic framework for education and training (ET2020). In addition, Erasmus+ is involved in achieving the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy. Countries participating to the Programme are all 28 EU Member States plus Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey. Erasmus+ budget of €14.7 billion is set to provide learning opportunities abroad for individuals (2/3 of budget) and to develop partnerships and reforms of the education and youth sectors (1/3 of budget).

More in detail, the activities funded by the Erasmus+ Programme are grouped into the following three Key Actions:

1. Learning mobility of individuals
2. Cooperation for innovation and exchange of good practices
3. Support for policy reform

Key Action 1 is the largest one and in 2017 it received 55% of the total budget (European Commission, 2018a). It refers to all the activities aimed at improving the skills, employability and cultural awareness of participants: therefore, all the opportunities for students, teachers, staff, volunteers, etc. to undertake learning and/or professional experiences in another country are included there. The implementation of such initiatives is managed mainly by National Agencies, which are responsible for supporting, monitoring and evaluating Erasmus+ projects in Programme countries, as well as for maintaining relationships with EU and their counterparts abroad. The second Key Action is about promoting the collaboration between organizations involved in the Erasmus+ programme (educational institutions, enterprises, public authorities, etc.) with the aim of sharing new practices and implement joint initiatives, for the modernization of institutions and education systems. Strategic initiatives under Key Action 2 were funded through 22% of total Erasmus+ commitments in 2017. Finally, Key Action 3 covers all the activities that support policy reforms for the enhancement of EU educational and training systems and that promote active citizenship among young people. The Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) and the European Youth Strategy are the guidelines for this type of initiatives.

Since the beginning of Erasmus programme in 1987, more than 4 million higher education students participated to the exchanges. Erasmus+ has increased a lot the overall mobility opportunities offered in the past 30 years: during the period 2014-2020, it is expected that 2 million students, including 450 000 trainees, will take the chance to study and train abroad under the Programme. The increasing attractiveness of Erasmus+ for young people and educational institutions is also proved by trends in the number of university students involved, which grew substantially in recent years.

According to the latest annual report of European Commission (2018a), around 325 800 higher education students went abroad thanks to Erasmus+ during academic year 2016/2017, almost reaching a total of 1 million since 2014. The greatest share (more than 72%) used the experience to study in another country for a period that can last up to 12 months and the rest of the students decided to undertake a traineeship abroad. Enjoying a training experience in a foreign country represents a growing trend, considering that the number of trainees went up



from 76 000 in 2014 to 88 900 in 2017: this reflects the fact that Erasmus+ is strengthening its focus on facilitating the transition between higher education and the world of work.

In 2016/2017, more women (61%) than men (49%) were engaged in Erasmus+; the average age of mobile higher education students was 22.5 and they spent on average 5 months abroad. For what concerns the preferred destination countries, Spain remains the most popular with 48 595 arrivals, followed by Germany (34 497), United Kingdom (31 727) and France (28 722), while 26 294 students chose Italy. Looking instead at the top sending countries, Italy is placed among the four countries with the highest number of outgoing students (35 666), after France (43 905), Germany (40 959) and Spain (40 079).

EU plans to renovate the Erasmus+ programme, building on its core strengths and enlarging the learning and mobility opportunities offered. With the proposals for the Erasmus Programme for 2012-2027 adopted in May 2018, the European Commission intends to double the budget to €30 billion, which should allow 12 million people to participate in the Programme, compared to 4 million people of the current Erasmus+. This represents a strong evidence that Europe is continuing to invest in empowering young people, by providing them more and more possibilities to enhance their skills, enlarge their expertise and improve their awareness of European identity.

## **1.4 Conclusions**

This chapter has analysed the main aspects and the current trends of international student mobility. The topic has been first addressed as part of the broader picture concerning the internationalization process of higher education. Indeed, globalization is increasing the focus of academic institutions on international activities and programs, two categories of which have been identified: one relates to initiatives occurring at the home campus and the other covers the initiatives that are performed across borders, including for example study abroad programs. Different motivations for internationalization have been considered, but the most relevant is for sure the need to provide future workers with the right skillset to enter an increasingly dynamic and globalised labour market. As a result, the chapter has then related international student mobility to the general framework of global mobility in the labour market. The several competences gained by students during their experiences in foreign countries, such as cross-cultural skills and the ability to work in different international contexts, are especially relevant for their future careers because globally mobile human resources are strategically important for today's companies. An overview of the main trends in global mobility has revealed that:

this phenomenon is becoming more and more varied in terms of policies and location; that it is placing the employee and his needs at the centre of the mobility program; and finally that it is taking advantage of the opportunities given by modern digital technologies. Thereafter, findings from a global survey on workforce's attitudes and interests in global mobility have been presented.

The chapter has then examined the topic of student mobility more in depth, starting with a focus on the Italian data. According to Almalaurea's latest survey, the number of graduates who completed a period abroad during the academic career is increasing, especially for those attending a two-year master. Some variability related to the field of study, the geographical location of the university and the family background has emerged, but overall the participation of Italian students to this type of experiences is growing over time. The Erasmus programme has given a fundamental contribution to this positive trend, because since its beginning in 1987 it has allowed thousands of young people to study or train abroad.

The importance of Erasmus has been underlined in the end of the chapter: an analysis of recent statistics about learning mobility in Europe has showed indeed that the EU Programme is the most popular mobility path for students. Thereafter, the structure and the main features of Erasmus+ (2014-2020) have been described, together with the latest trends regarding the profile of participants and the preferred destinations. The competences gained through Erasmus and other mobility programs are recognized to be more and more important to enhance students' preparedness to the labour market and to foster their personal development. Therefore, the effects of study abroad experiences will be explained in detail in the next chapter.

## **OUTCOMES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY: LITERATURE REVIEW**

After having introduced the topic of international student mobility and its relationship with the global labour market in the first chapter, it is necessary to address an important question: what are the outcomes of study abroad programs? This chapter will answer with a review of the literature concerning the benefits that students gain from the participation in such initiatives. Researchers have investigated several types of outcomes in years, as it will be explained in the first introductory paragraph. Therefore, to have a clearer overview of the explored effects on students, the following analysis will be organized in three major areas: skills development, influence on future career and, finally, personal growth.

### **2.1 Research on the outcomes of study abroad programs**

As highlighted in Chapter One, learning mobility is a topic of growing interest over the last years, with the increase in the number of programs offered by higher education institutions and in the participation rate of students. As a consequence, research on possible outcomes of study abroad has expanded rapidly, especially in recent years, although it emerged since the last decades of 1900 (e.g. Armstrong, 1984; Nash, 1976). For this reason, the review that will be conducted in this chapter will focus mainly on the studies undertaken during the last two decades.

Literature generally addresses programs lasting from one week to a maximum of one year (Geyer et al., 2017; Roy et al., 2018): traditional semester exchanges and full year programs, but also summer programs and immersive experiences of few weeks are taken into consideration by scholars, according to the increasing variety of opportunities provided by universities. In the majority of cases, mobility experiences consist on the participation to courses and other learning activities in foreign universities. The most frequent destinations are European countries, although some Australian studies (Crossman and Clarke, 2010; Potts, 2015) consider also America and Asia. Moreover, an overwhelming proportion of research comes from Europe

and U.S. and only few studies analyse mobility outcomes for students from elsewhere in the world, probably due also to the lower popularity of study abroad programs and to lower opportunities to participate.

As a matter of fact, large-scale researches assessing the impact of mobility programs in Europe and U.S. have spread, with surveys collected from thousands of participants, in addition to scholarly studies with a narrower focus. For example, the Erasmus programme has been evaluated in years through major studies such as VALERA (Bracht et al., 2006) and REFLEX projects (Teichler, 2011), as well as through periodic comprehensive reports by the European Commission (European Commission, 2014 and 2019). All of them collect data not only from mobile students, but also from mobile teachers and higher education institutions of the European countries involved, in order to have a feedback on the success of the programme and to support further improvement. In the U.S., similar studies for scale and number of years covered were performed by the Institute for the International Education of Students (IES), an American academic consortium that assessed the results of its wide range of mobility programs throughout 50 years on 17 000 participants (e.g. Norris and Gillespie, 2009), and by the SAGE project, a research tracing the impact of study abroad on U.S. alumni from 1960 to 2005 (Paige et al., 2009). All these large studies recognized the importance of studying in a foreign country and identified positive effects in different dimensions such as future employability, competences and personal growth.

Scholars, too, generally agree that participation in international mobility programs provides substantial benefits to students. A wide variety of outcomes has been studied in years, so it can be useful to classify them in the following areas:

- Skills development
- Career outcomes
- Personal growth

Most papers looked at the relationship between study abroad and the improvement of several skills, relevant also for students' future employability. In particular, researchers identified progress especially on foreign language proficiency (see for example Dwyer, 2004; Franklin, 2010; Teichler and Janson, 2007) and on intercultural competences and cross-cultural communication (e.g. Behrnd and Porzelt, 2012; Black and Duhon, 2006; Chang et al., 2013; Varela and Gatlin-Watts, 2014; Williams, 2005). Soft skills that can be applied in a professional context have been subject of analysis as well, although less frequently (see Crossman and Clarke, 2010; Jones, 2013; Potts, 2015). For example, the work by Geyer et al. (2017) ex-

amined how of study abroad impacts on leadership skills, finding that short-term programs have a significant effect on the development of such quality.

More recently, scholars have begun to focus their attention also on the influences on students' future career path and career choices. Many researches (e.g. by Di Pietro, 2012; Orahod et al., 2004; Parey and Waldinger, 2010) have found that who spent a period abroad is more likely to pursue an international career, or to express interest in working for an international organization, than who did not have such experience. For what concerns the impact on career choices, students often report that the participation in study abroad programs helped them to clarify their professional goals (Kronholz and Osborn, 2016), to better understand their interests (Norris and Gillespie, 2009) and to make subsequent career decisions (Paige et al., 2009). Finally, the third outcome area includes findings related to students' personal development; the benefits examined vary a lot across a range of personal characteristics. The most frequently reported are: the enhancement of self-confidence, maturity and independence (DeGraaf et al., 2013; Marcotte et al., 2007), the increase in sense of initiative (Orahod et al., 2004) and a higher degree of open-mindedness (Crossman and Clarke, 2010). Black and Duhon (2006) also found important effects on personal growth through a survey administered at the beginning and then at conclusion of the mobility program, which revealed that students had higher perceived levels of tolerance, empathy, confidence and independence after the end of the experience.

As far as research methods are concerned, in most cases questionnaires on scale were used to gather data. Some studies adopted a mixture of quantitative and qualitative analysis as well, conducting also interviews to have a more detailed understanding about participants' experiences (e.g. Franklin, 2010).

The majority of scholars based their research on data collected only after the completion of international programs: some surveys took place immediately after, while most of them were sent some years later because they involved already employed formerly mobile students. Moreover, only few studies used control groups to compare the level of skills, the personal characteristics or the career choices of students who did and did not participate in mobility programs: an example is the work by Orahod et al. (2004 and 2008) who considered both groups of students in their surveys, drawing a meaningful comparison of the results obtained. Literature on the effects of study abroad programs will be more extensively reviewed in the next paragraphs, according to the classification in three areas of achievement proposed above. Table 2.1 summarizes the studies taken into consideration, distinguishing them by category of outcome. In addition, it provides information on the main characteristics of the reviewed arti-

cles: the research setting (including the number of people in the sample and the country where the study was conducted), the research method and the effect (positive/null/negative) on the outcome dimension considered.

Table 2.1 - Review of studies on the impacts of international mobility programs

Outcome area	Studies	Research setting *	Research method **	Assessed impact ***
<b>Skills development</b>				
✓ Foreign language proficiency	Dwyer, 2004;	N=3723, United States;	QN - survey;	+
	European Commission, 2019;	N=almost 77000, European Union;	QN - surveys and QL - interviews;	+
	Franklin, 2010;	N=52, United States;	QN - survey and QL - interviews;	+
	Teichler and Janson, 2007.	3 studies: N=1200(A),900(B),4600(C), EU.	QN - a survey for each study (A,B,C).	+
	Behrnd and Porzelt, 2012;	2 studies: N=72(One), 255(Two), Germany;	QN - survey for each study (One, Two);	0/+
	Black and Duhon, 2006;	N=26, United States;	QN - survey;	+
	Chang et al., 2013;	N=356, Taiwan;	QN - survey;	0/+
	Crossman and Clarke, 2010;	N=45, Australia;	QL - interviews, open-ended questions;	+
	Dwyer, 2004;	N=3723, United States;	QN - survey;	+
	European Commission, 2019;	N=almost 77000, European Union;	QN - surveys and QL - interviews;	+
	Franklin, 2010;	N=52, United States;	QN - survey and QL - interviews;	+
	Marcotte et al., 2007;	N=215, Canada;	QN - survey;	+
	Orahhood et al. 2004;	N=198, United States;	QN - survey and QL-open-ended questions;	+
	Pedersen, 2010;	N=45, United States;	QN - survey;	0
✓ Soft skills	Teichler and Janson, 2007;	3 studies: N=1200(A),900(B),4600(C), EU;	QN - a survey for each study (A,B,C);	+
	Tuleja 2008;	N=45, United States;	QN - survey, QL - written papers;	+
	Varela and Gatlin-Watts, 2014;	N=84, United States;	QN - survey;	0/+
	Williams, 2005.	N=52, United States.	QN - survey.	+
	Bracht et al., 2006;	N=4589, European Union;	QN - survey;	+
	Crossman and Clarke, 2010;	N=45, Australia;	QL - interviews, open-ended questions;	+
	European Commission, 2019;	N=almost 77000, European Union;	QN - surveys and QL - interviews;	+
	Geyer et al., 2017;	N=970, United States;	QN - survey;	+
	Lee et al., 2012;	N=135, United States;	QN - survey;	+
	Marcotte et al., 2007;	N=215, Canada;	QN - survey;	+

(continued on next page)

Outcome area	Studies	Research setting *	Research method **	Assessed impact ***
	Orahood et al., 2004;	N=198, United States;	QN - survey and QL - open-ended questions;	+
	Orahood et al., 2008;	N=417, United States;	QN - survey and QL - open-ended questions;	+
	Potts, 2015.	N=226, Australia.	QN - survey.	+
<b>Career outcomes</b>				
✓ Career internationalization	Crossman and Clarke, 2010;	N=45, Australia;	QL - interviews, open-ended questions;	+
	Di Pietro, 2012;	N=30300, Italy;	QN - survey;	+
	European Commission, 2019;	N=almost 77000, European Union;	QN - surveys and QL - interviews;	+
	Franklin, 2010;	N=52, United States;	QN - survey and QL - interviews;	+
	Jon et al., 2018;	N=37, United States;	QL - individual interviews;	+
	Mosneaga, 2013;	N=43, Denmark;	QL - semi-structured interviews;	+
	Norris and Gillespie, 2009;	N=3723, United States;	QN - survey;	+
	Orahood et al., 2004;	N=198, United States;	QN - survey and QL - open-ended questions;	+
	Orahood et al., 2008;	N=417, United States;	QN - survey and QL - open-ended questions;	0
	Paige et al., 2009;	N=6391 63 interviews, U.S.;	QN - surveys and QL - interviews;	+
	Parey and Waldinger, 2010;	N=54079, Germany;	QN - survey;	+
	Potts, 2015;	N=226, Australia;	QN - survey;	+
	Teichler, 2011;	N=35968, European Union;	QN - survey;	+
	Teichler and Janson, 2007.	3 studies: N=1200(A),900(B),4600(C), EU.	QN - a survey for each study (A,B,C).	+
✓ Career choices	Adam et al., 2018;	N=1874, United States;	QN - survey;	+
	Bryla, 2015;	N=2450, Poland;	QN - survey;	+
	DeGraaf et al., 2013;	N=354 26 interviews, U.S.;	QN - survey and QL - interviews;	+
	Dwyer, 2004;	N=3723, United States;	QN - survey;	+
	Franklin, 2010;	N=52, United States;	QN - survey and QL - interviews;	+
	Geyer et al., 2017;	N=970, United States;	QN - survey;	+
	Jon et al., 2018;	N=37, United States;	QL - individual interviews;	+
	Kronholz and Osborn, 2016;	N=106, United States;	QN - survey and QL - interviews;	+

(continued on next page)



Outcome area	Studies	Research setting *	Research method **	Assessed impact ***
	Marcotte et al., 2007;	N=215, Canada;	QN - survey;	+
	Norris and Gillespie, 2009;	N=3723, United States;	QN - survey;	+
	Orahood et al., 2004;	N=198, United States;	QN - survey and QL-open-ended questions;	+
	Orahood et al., 2008;	N=417, United States;	QN - survey and QL-open-ended questions;	0
	Paige et al., 2009;	N=6391 63 interviews, U.S.;	QN - surveys and QL - interviews;	+
	Waibel et al., 2017.	65 documents reviewed.	Literature review.	0/+
<b>Personal growth</b>	Black and Duhon, 2006;	N=26, United States;	QN - survey;	+
	Bracht et al., 2006;	N=4589, European Union;	QN - survey;	+
	Crossman and Clarke, 2010;	N=45, Australia;	QL - interviews, open-ended questions;	+
	DeGraaf et al., 2013;	N=354 26 interviews, U.S.;	QN - survey and QL - interviews;	+
	European Commission, 2014;	N=almost 80000, European Union;	QN - surveys and QL - interviews;	+
	European Commission., 2019;	N=almost 77000, European Union;	QN - surveys and QL - interviews;	+
	Marcotte et al., 2007;	N=215, Canada;	QN - survey;	+
	Norris and Gillespie, 2009;	N=3723, United States;	QN - survey;	+
	Orahood et al., 2004;	N=198, United States;	QN - survey and QL-open-ended questions;	+
	Orahood et al., 2008;	N=417, United States;	QN - survey and QL-open-ended questions;	+
	Potts, 2015.	N=226, Australia.	QN - survey.	+

Note: \* N= number of individuals in the research sample; \*\* QN= quantitative research, QL= qualitative research; \*\*\* Impact on the outcome area: '+' positive, '0' null, '-' negative.

## **2.2 Effects on skills development**

The first impact area that will be analysed concerns the variations and improvements in the level of a diverse set of skills. Therefore, the question addressed in this paragraph is: how did the empirical research associate the development of certain competences to students' participation in international mobility programs?

### **2.2.1 Foreign language proficiency**

One of the most natural advancements that students experience after completing a period abroad regards foreign language fluency. According to the European Commission (2019), the opportunity to learn a new language is among the main motivations to participate in Erasmus+, and in fact the 88% of students who took part in the programme perceived an actual improvement in their foreign language skills. A previous work by Teichler and Janson (2007), based on three major surveys of former Erasmus participants, revealed that mobile students felt three times more confident in using a second language than non-mobiles. Respondents also reported that this competence played a role in their employer's recruitment decision and that it was an important element for their job.

The frequency of use of the foreign language during the period abroad proves to be an important factor for the level of skill, as one might expect. For example, Franklin (2010) found a correlation between the type of housing arrangement used by students during the mobility program and the long-term use of a foreign language, also for professional purposes: who lived in a homestay or with a local student turned out to be more likely to use a second language in his/her future career. Accordingly, in her research about the impact of study abroad duration on learning outcomes, Dwyer (2004) confirmed that the length of exposure and the amount of practice are the reasons why full-year students feel more committed and more confident in using a foreign language regularly (also in their workplace) than who went abroad for a shorter period.

### **2.2.2 Intercultural competencies**

An important field often explored by scholars refers to the improvement of intercultural skills. Research in this sense has brought to the identification of a wide array of outcomes: the most frequently studied are cultural awareness, cross-cultural adaptability and cross-cultural communication.

However, results have been less conclusive than in the area of language acquisition: the majority of studies still indicates positive effects on intercultural skills (e.g. Franklin, 2010; Marcotte et al., 2007), others report no significant difference between students with and without international experience (for example on cultural sensitivity, as in Pedersen, 2010) or only some improvements limited to particular dimensions of this competence (Varela and Gatlin-Watts, 2014).

There is no general agreement among scholars on the definition of intercultural competence, since it is a quite broad and articulated concept (Deardorff, 2006). A possible definition comes from the model by Gertsen (1990), which is one of the most used in the literature: intercultural competence is described here as “the ability [of individuals] to function effectively in another culture” (p.341). According to the author, it is made up by three interdependent aspects: an affective dimension (related to personality traits and attitudes such as openness and empathy), a cognitive dimension (including the knowledge of a different culture with its characteristics, values, conventions and acceptable/unacceptable behaviours) and a communicative, behavioural dimension (which reflects the ability to adopt an appropriate and meaningful communication style with people from a different cultural background). This model covers all the most important components of intercultural competence, that sometimes are separately analysed by researchers as outcomes of mobility, as it will be explained below. Behrnd and Porzelt (2012) used indeed Gertsen’s approach to examine the effect of study abroad on the level of intercultural competence of students, designing a survey that incorporated the three dimensions of the theoretical model. Comparing students who did and did not have an experience abroad, they found that the simple fact of having studied in a foreign country does not impact significantly on the intercultural competencies: the length of the stay abroad is what actually matters for their enhancement. Namely, students who spent a considerable period abroad had higher levels of cognitive intercultural competence, and who stayed for more than ten months also showed higher results in the affective dimension. This is consistent with the findings of Dwyer (2004), who also states that the duration of the mobility experience is very important in achieving notable benefits: a program lasting a year is more effective, in terms of intercultural development, than one lasting only few months. For example, she reports that statements like “continuing to be influenced in one’s interactions with people from different cultures” or “achieving greater understanding of one’s own cultural values and biases” record strong agreement especially among full-year students.

Another work that takes into consideration the outcomes of student mobility on cultural competences is the one by Varela and Gatlin-Watts (2014). This paper is indeed of particular in-

terest because it focuses on management education and, what is more, it compares different destinations, accounting for the importance of cultural distance. The authors define multicultural competence as “a set of learned attributes that enables individuals to interact constructively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds” (p.191) and they build their research on the theoretical model of cultural intelligence by Earley and Ang (2003). Based on that, they test the hypothesis that studying abroad positively influences all the aspects of cultural intelligence constituting the model: metacognitive (diversity awareness), cognitive (knowledge of facts about different cultures), motivational (inclination to further explore other cultures), and behavioural (ability to adapt to culturally diverse contexts). The survey was divided into a pre- and post test and was administered to students participating in an exchange program whose destinations were either Mexico or Canada. Results showed that while students demonstrated improvements of the cognitive and metacognitive components of cultural intelligence after studying abroad, the motivational and behavioural aspects were not affected. Therefore, international mobility does not necessarily lead to the development of all possible dimensions of multicultural competence: according to the authors, programs need to be designed to address also the motivational and behavioural capabilities in a purposive way, for example by involving students in more immersive and interactive experiences (Varela and Gatlin-Watts, 2014). As already anticipated, this work is among the few in the literature that compares outcomes for students travelling to different countries. The researchers found indeed that destination is important in determining gains from studying abroad and they linked this to the concept of cultural distance, that is the degree by which two cultures are different from each other. Namely, students that went to Mexico showed a larger development of metacognitive cultural intelligence than who visited Canada: the greater distance between their own culture and the hosting one caused them to increase their awareness of cultural differences.

Long-term outcomes of study abroad on intercultural competence have been addressed also by Franklin (2010). Similarly to the studies mentioned above, the author distinguishes different areas of this skill (i.e. cognitive/knowledge, affective/attitudes, and behaviour/skills), but the findings here suggest an improvement in all the dimensions. In addition, the students surveyed comment that the intercultural competencies gained through the mobility experience are useful also for their professional work.

Scholars investigated the influence of study abroad programs also on more specific skills that are still linked to the broader field of intercultural competencies. For example, some studies focused on students' development of cultural awareness, that is the understanding of foreign

cultures: Black and Duhon (2006) and Marcotte et al. (2007) observed an increase in such ability after the mobility programs, and the qualitative findings by Crossman and Clarke (2010) confirmed this positive effect.

Furthermore, cross-cultural adaptability and cross-cultural communication skills have received increasing attention as possible outcomes in recent years. Indeed, as previously discussed in Chapter One, individuals' abilities to adapt to another culture and to have successful interactions with people from a different background are becoming fundamental for employees in various professions, due to the growing internationalization of the working environment. For this reason, scholars have begun to explore if and how mobility programs help students (that is, future employees) to develop these specific competences, and research has led to encouraging results. As a matter of fact, Williams (2005), through a pre- and post-test design, observed that students who went abroad exhibited a greater increase in intercultural adaptability and cross-cultural communication than students who did not participate; besides, the experience enhanced these skills even if they were already present in who decided to study abroad. Moreover, the author found that the level of exposure to different cultures (measured, for example, with the number of friends of another culture, the frequency of attendance to cultural classes and events, the number foreign languages studied, etc.) was the best predictor of intercultural communication skills. This underlines the importance of designing international programs in a way that facilitates deep interactions with people of the host countries, in order to let students gain effective benefits in terms of intercultural competencies.

The more recent study by Chang et al. (2013) empirically examined the relationship between international experiences and cross-cultural adaptability, confirming that the level of engagement with people of a different culture is what really matters in enhancing students' skills. In other terms, study abroad programs provide the opportunity for a significant development of cultural adaptability, but the outcomes are related more to how one actually behaves and interacts in the new context.

Other works in the literature (Orahod et al., 2004; Tuleja, 2008) established that cross-cultural communication and adaptability skills improved as a result of study abroad, reporting that, after their experience, students felt more confident in having conversations with people from other countries and in dealing with culturally diverse situations.

Specific research about the impact of the Erasmus programme also supports these evidences. Teichler and Janson (2007), for example, found that students who participated in Erasmus considered the experience helpful to understand host cultures' values and society and to enhance their ability to work with people from other cultural settings. Similarly, the latest Eras-

mus+ impact report (European Commission, 2019) revealed that 9 former mobile students out of 10 agreed that they improved their intercultural skills, especially adaptability and communication with people of different cultures. Another interesting result of this survey, coherent with already cited works (see Varela and Gatlin-Watts, 2014), is that who moves to distant countries obtains the largest benefits: this proves that cultural distance has a critical role in fostering awareness of cultural gaps and openness to new contexts, norms and conventions.

In conclusion, the contribution of study abroad programs to the enhancement of intercultural skills has been widely examined by scholars, and the majority of studies has brought to positive findings. In today's globalized world, it seems more important than ever to develop the capabilities that are needed to understand and act in different cultural settings. For this reason, researchers increasingly suggest a careful design of mobility programs in order to improve their effectiveness in terms of multicultural skills, since mere studying abroad does not necessarily lead to higher levels of competence.

### 2.2.3 Employability skills

Employability skills, or soft skills, are defined in the context of higher education as “a set of achievements—skills, understandings and personal attributes—that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations” (Yorke, 2006). These competences are independent of the field of study, hence they are also known as “transferable skills” because they are applicable in a variety of work contexts. Soft skills are usually opposed to hard skills, which are instead the technical abilities acquired through education, that can be employed only in specific jobs. The category of soft skills is broad and includes mainly personal characteristics and social competences. Some examples are: self-confidence, responsibility, sense of initiative, flexibility, time management, leadership, teamwork, communication skills, problem-solving. They are becoming increasingly important in the labour market and their demand is expected to rise sharply in the future. Namely, according to McKinsey (2018) social and emotional skills (such as communicating and managing others) and higher cognitive skills (i.e. creativity, complex information analysis and problem-solving) will see a substantial growth in demand, due to the technological innovations that are transforming the nature of work and consequently shifting job requirements.

Recognizing the key role of soft skills for future employability, higher education institutions are promoting more and more their development and international mobility programs are in-

creasingly presented as an opportunity for students to enhance these competences. As a result, in recent years literature has begun to analyse more in depth the influence of study abroad on the improvement of soft skills, with growing positive evidences.

One of the most cited works on the topic is the one by Crossman and Clarke (2010): their research took an array on different stakeholders to discuss about the relationship between international experiences and graduate employability. Australian students, universities and employers took part in a qualitative study whose findings suggest that mobility programs are generally perceived as a means to develop soft skills that are relevant for students' future careers. In particular, participants noted the enhancement of key competences such as sense of initiative, taking responsibilities, creativity, empathy and the ability to build relationships with others.

Another interesting Australian study, by Potts (2015), identified the development of employability skills among students as the major outcome of learning abroad. Indeed, former participants in mobility programs argued that the experience improved their interpersonal, communication, teamwork, problem-solving and analytical skills. The author underlines the contribution of these findings to the mission of the Australian higher education sector, which has been fostering the development of employability skills among graduates for more than twenty years: the Government even built a general framework to guide institutions in providing graduates with the set of soft skills required in the labour market (Potts, 2015).

In U.S., the research by Orahood et al. (2004; 2008) supports evidence that participation in study abroad programs helps students to gain employability skills. In the first study (2004) students recognized that they learned or strengthened different valuable competencies, including: problem solving and crisis management, innovation capabilities and adaptability in unfamiliar contexts, communication skills, sense of initiative and confidence. The following work (2008) had positive conclusions as well: more specifically, participants felt that they had developed interpersonal and communication skills and increased their flexibility and adaptation. The authors explain that students considered the competencies acquired through international mobility as very important for their growth: thereafter, they suggest that further efforts should be made in order to educate employers about the value of transferable skills.

Other empirical findings on the topic can be found in the paper by Lee et al. (2012), who discovered benefits for mobile students in terms of creative thinking and ability to generate original ideas in different settings. Geyer et al. (2017), as anticipated above, studied the effect on leadership skills and the results suggested a positive impact of short-term study abroad programs: American students who took part in such initiatives were more likely to hold leader-

ship positions than those who did not participate. Moreover, Marcotte et al. (2007), with a survey on business graduates of a Canadian college, found that they improved communication skills, confidence and sense of initiative after the mobility experience.

For what concerns Europe, studies about the effectiveness of the Erasmus programme have always paid special attention to outcomes on employability skills. As a matter of fact the European Union is committed to ensuring that students in higher education acquire all the relevant competences for employment. For this purpose the Commission adopted the New Skills Agenda for Europe in 2016, in order to launch specific actions to provide the right set of skills to people working in the 21st century. Some soft skills considered important (also included in the European Key competences Framework) are: critical thinking, creativity, initiative, problem solving, risk assessment, decision taking, and constructive management of feelings (European Parliament, 2006). In this setting, Erasmus+ is meant to improve students' key competences, in particular those facilitating their entry in the labour market. Findings indeed prove the association between participation in the programme and development of soft skills: the last report by the EU (European Commission, 2019) constructed the Employability skills impact index specifically to perform this analysis, combining items on all the most relevant competences for employment. The results of the index reveal that mobile students report enhanced levels of communication skills, teamwork, adaptability, analytical and problem-solving skills and planning and organizational skills. Other competencies where they perceived improvements were creativity, decision-making and critical thinking.

Also previous research on the professional impact of Erasmus mobility (Bracht et al., 2006) found that former participants gave high scores to their soft skills at time of graduation: some examples are adaptability, problem-solving, analytical skills and initiative.

In conclusion, studies in several countries have recognized the contribution of international mobility in boosting students' transferable skills: given the increasing demand of this type of competences, it is essential that higher education institutions continue to promote their development as a key objective of study abroad programs.

### **2.3 Effects on future career**

Although literature on the outcomes of study abroad has focused predominantly on benefits related to competencies and personal development, recent research has started to consider also the effects on students' career. As such, this paragraph will provide a review of the most im-



portant findings on the so-called “horizontal” career dimensions: international career paths and career choices.

### 2.3.1 Career internationalization

In general, scholars have obtained positive answers from the association between participation in study abroad programs and subsequent international career paths, both in the European and in the American context and also with some contributions from Australia. Overall, they found that mobile students are more likely to work in a foreign country than those who did not study abroad.

The majority of studies was conducted in Europe and mainly took into consideration former Erasmus students. For example, Parey and Waldinger (2010) investigated the impact of learning abroad on later international mobility in the labour market with a survey on German university graduates that focused on participation to the Erasmus programme. The authors found a strong causal effect: undertaking this mobility experience increases an individual’s probability of working abroad by about 15%. They argue that there can be different reasons why mobile students decide to work in a foreign country, which is, in most cases, the same where they studied abroad. For example, they report that some students moved because they developed a particular interest in foreign cultures and therefore looked for a job abroad; others found better employment opportunities in the host country or received interesting offers from abroad; some others exploited contacts made during their stay.

Similarly, Di Pietro (2012) conducted an analysis on whether participation in international exchange programs influences future labour mobility among Italian graduates. The empirical results reveal again a positive relationship between these two dimensions because they suggest that, in Italy, studying abroad increases the probability of working in a foreign country by between 18% and 24%. This association is confirmed by the more recent findings by Almalaurea (2019b), included in the annual survey on Italian graduates’ employment conditions: the report shows that mobility causes mobility, because who undertook a mobility experience like Erasmus tends to be more willing to consider a career abroad, often returning in the program’s host country.

Mosneaga (2013) also examined the connection between study abroad and the decision to continue the career in the destination country, by interviewing international students and graduates in Denmark who later decided to settle there as foreign workers. The author illustrates the multiple factors that shape international students’ decisions to move to Denmark for

job purposes after completing their studies, with the main reasons being either finding a relevant job or meeting a partner while abroad.

Always in the European context, the career consequences of international mobility before graduation have been noticed in the works by Teichler (2011), as part of the REFLEX study on graduate employment, and by Teichler and Janson (2007). Indeed, both studies confirm that people who were mobile during their course of study are more likely to be involved in international careers after graduation, or to work in an international environment, than those who were non-mobile. For example, according to the survey by Teichler (2011) 34% mobile individuals during studies later worked in an organization having an international scope, compared to only 26% of non-mobiles.

Furthermore, specific findings about Erasmus experience (European Commission, 2019) demonstrated that jobs of former mobile students have more international characteristics than those of non-mobile people: 47% of Erasmus graduates definitely agreed that they work in an international environment, compared to 37% of non-mobile graduates. More in detail, the job aspects related to internationalisation that participants report more often are: international business contacts (42%), cooperation with branches abroad (40%) and with foreign colleagues (39%). Moreover, 15% stated that they moved abroad for work. Finally, the study is consistent with the evidence that mobile students are generally more open to pursuing international careers: after the experience, the great majority of Erasmus graduates (around 87%) declared that they would be willing to work abroad for a period and almost all of them (95%) would like at least to work in an international context.

Moving to the body of literature coming from the U.S., similar results were obtained by scholars. One of the most revealing studies was conducted by Norris and Gillespie (2009), who used data from an extensive survey performed by the Institute for the International Education of Students (an American higher education consortium organizing study abroad initiatives) in 2002 on 17 000 participants to its programs between 1950 and 1999. Examining answers of the 3700 respondents to the survey, they found that study abroad had a significant impact on alumni's career, influencing them to get a job in a foreign country, to work for a multinational organization in the U.S., or to have an internationally oriented job. The magnitude of the effect on career internationalisation was noticed to grow decade by decade, since alumni who undertook mobility programs in the 1990s were much more likely to be involved in global careers than previous participants. The authors illustrate the importance of study abroad in shaping future career paths also referring that, on the whole, almost half of the 3700 respondents had a job with international characteristics.

Previous research conducted by Orahod et al. (2004) on business students of an American university is also in line with these findings. Analysing whether study abroad fostered the interest of business students in an international career, and comparing results with a control group of non-mobile students, the researchers found that mobility experiences do have a relevant impact. Namely, they report that 83% of former mobile students was interested or strongly interested in working overseas, compared to only 51% of those who did not study abroad; another important finding is that 58% of respondents was actually looking for a job position in a foreign country, after having studied abroad.

Other studies by Paige et al. (2009), Franklin (2010) and Jon et al. (2018) on American graduates obtained positive feedbacks in terms of career internationalization. Franklin (2010), for example, used a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods to assess the career impact of mobility programs on the alumni of a U.S. college, and data indicated a strong effect: the majority of the sample worked in an international or multicultural setting (73%). In addition, the author specifies that the probability to have an international career is higher for alumni who lived in a homestay or who followed courses in a foreign language while abroad.

Finally, turning to Australian contributions to the literature, important studies were those by Potts (2015) and by Crossman and Clarke (2010). In particular, the first paper explored career benefits for college graduates who participated to learning abroad experiences between 2007 and 2010 and were employed at the time of the survey. It was noticed that study abroad motivates students in choosing their professional path, and that those oriented to an international career were enabled to clarify their interest thanks to the experience. Moreover, the statistical analysis pointed out that, among many possible factors that may predict future work for an international organization, studying abroad many times is by far the most significant (Potts, 2015).

Few studies are in contrast with the general evidence of positive outcomes on future international labour market mobility. An example is the paper by Orahod et al. (2008) which followed the study by the same authors that was discussed earlier in this paragraph (Orahod et al., 2004). Indeed, this second research started from the previous finding that who studied abroad expressed greater interest in working in a foreign country and the goal was to ascertain whether, after five to ten years, these graduates were actually more likely to pursue an international career than those who did not study abroad. The surprising result was that the number of alumni who had a globally-oriented job was higher among non-mobile people, although mobile alumni were significantly more interested in working abroad. Therefore, the authors

conclude that studying abroad impacts more on students' personal development than on future career.

In conclusion, the vast majority of studies reviewed suggests that mobility programs do have an influence on the decision to pursue an international career, which could mean either working in a foreign country or having a job with at least some degree of internationalization (e.g. having contacts with branches located abroad, working in international teams, travelling for job purposes, etc.). However, given that the number of studies investigating the consequences on career internationalization is significantly lower than those examining skills development and personal outcomes, scholars generally agree on the need for further research on this field.

### 2.3.2 Career choices

There is growing evidence that study abroad helps students to make future career choices and to have a clearer picture of their professional goals.

One of the most important studies on this topic is the paper by Kronholz and Osborn (2016), who surveyed a group of American undergraduate students enrolled in mobility programs in 2013 and 2014, adopting a mix of quantitative and qualitative research methods (statistical analysis and interviews). They aimed at measuring the effect of participation in study abroad initiatives on career decision-making and on the vocational identity, which can be defined as the clear understanding of professional goals, interests and values. Findings suggest a very positive impact both on vocational identity and on career-decision making abilities: after the mobility program, almost all students (94%) reported that they had a better knowledge of their values and interests and the majority also agreed that they had a clearer understanding of career choices. The authors report some qualitative responses as well, which confirm that students perceive that studying abroad significantly helped them to be more confident in their career decisions and to learn more about their professional goals and preferences.

Individual interviews were also used by Jon et al. (2018) in a survey on 37 study abroad participants from U.S. higher education institutions. They found that mobility experiences provided students with the opportunity to clarify their own values and career decisions and influenced them in developing or confirming the choice to pursue an international career. Namely, many respondents argue that participation in those programs was very useful to have a clearer picture of their professional perspectives and to identify the best work environment for them, which often turned out to be globally oriented. With regards to this latter aspect, the researchers note that "the international aspect of study abroad itself appears to have convinced participants that they want to remain in an international context for their education or career" (p.13).

Similarly, DeGraaf et al. (2013) asked graduates of an American college about the influence of a semester abroad on their vocational direction and professional development, obtaining positive feedbacks: respondents found the experience highly beneficial for their career path and helpful for their future career choices. Moreover, the effect of studying abroad was perceived to a larger extent by students who graduated more recently, maybe because they recalled the experience more easily.

Prior research by Dwyer (2004) also confirmed the existence of outcomes related to career development, besides highlighting that full-year programs provide the most significant and long-lasting impacts. As a matter of fact, she found that studying abroad for a whole year was more likely to foster interest in a career direction (70%) and to promote the acquisition of skills that influenced students' career path (82%), while shorter programs were associated to lower percentages in these items. In addition, findings suggested that students who spent a year in a foreign country were almost three times more likely to change their career plans after the experience, than those who studied abroad for a shorter period. Dwyer based her research on data provided by the large survey of the IES made in 2002, just like Norris and Gillespie did in their work of 2009. Besides finding significant effects of study abroad on career internationalization (already discussed in the previous paragraph), Norris and Gillespie recognized that mobility influences students' career path in many different aspects. Their findings are in line with the prior work by Dwyer: also here the majority of respondents reported that participation in study abroad programs enabled them to develop an interest in the career path pursued (62%) and to gain useful competences for their professional life (77%). Norris and Gillespie also conducted a comparison between mobile alumni who had a global career and mobile alumni who did not work internationally, identifying dramatic differences related to the career impact of the study abroad experience. In particular, who had a globally oriented job was much more likely to consider the mobility program very important in changing his/her career plans and in fostering interest in a professional direction. Therefore, authors conclude that learning abroad leads many participants to look for jobs with international aspects, although not everyone has such plans before the experience (Norris and Gillespie, 2009).

Evidence about the influence of international mobility programs on career choices was supported also by Orahod et al. (2004), Franklin (2010) and more recently by Geyer et al. (2017). Paige et al. (2009), studying the impact on global engagement and on individuals' career paths, found that the majority of former study abroad participants evaluated their experience as important for their professional decisions to a large or at least some degree. Other em-

empirical studies confirming outcomes on career development and decision-making have been conducted by Marcotte et al. (2007), Bryla (2015), Waibel et al. (2017) and Adam et al. (2018).

## **2.4 Effects on personal growth**

Along with skills development and career consequences, the third outcome area of study abroad that we can identify regards participants' personal growth. International mobility programs bring about valuable opportunities for students to enrich themselves personally, develop more confidence in their capabilities and learn more about themselves. The importance of this dimension is increasingly underlined by higher education institutions, which present this type of experience not only as a chance to study and live in a foreign country and to gain employability skills, but also as a way to enhance one's personal development.

The European Union, for example, has always promoted students' personal growth as a key effect of the Erasmus programme, as proved in the periodic assessments by the European Commission (for example, those of 2014 and 2019) and in other researches. As a matter of fact, the VALERA project (Bracht et al., 2006) found that Erasmus participants in 2000/2001 rated "maturity and personal development" as the most valuable outcome of study abroad. More recently, the Erasmus impact study of 2014 (European Commission, 2014) examined the development of some personality traits as a result of participation in the programme, by taking ex-ante and ex-post surveys. The analysis, based on a psychometrical tool called "memo" methodology, focused in particular on six personal characteristics that were considered important also for future employability: confidence (about oneself and one's own abilities), curiosity (open-mindedness), tolerance of ambiguity (tolerance toward others), serenity (knowledge of one's own strengths and weaknesses), decisiveness (awareness of what one wants) and vigour (capability to solve problems). Findings suggested notable gains in these six factors thanks to mobility: after the Erasmus, higher values were observed for all the personality traits and also qualitative responses confirmed that students perceived a substantial personal development as a result of the experience abroad, especially concerning the levels of confidence and curiosity (more than 90% agreed about gains in these dimensions). Indeed, the majority talked about improvements in self-confidence, independence and autonomy and recognized that mobility helped them to be more open-minded and mature. Overall, they felt Erasmus as an important step for personal growth leading to adulthood (European Commission, 2014). The subsequent Erasmus+ impact study of 2019 strengthened these findings, alt-

hough changing the factors under consideration: self-confidence, cultural openness, goal orientation and social openness were assessed before and after the programme to evaluate how it affected students' personality. Results confirmed that mobile students experience a change in their personal traits and attitudes. Moreover, Erasmus+ participants exhibited higher values than non-mobile students especially in cultural and social openness, but the largest improvement still concerns self-confidence (European Commission, 2019).

The personal benefits of study abroad were examined also in researches conducted by scholars on more limited samples. Black and Duhon (2006), for example, evaluated the results of a survey on a group of business students who participated to a mobility program in London, finding that the experience had a significant impact on their personal growth: after studying abroad, respondents showed higher scores in autonomy, independence and self-confidence. Also Marcotte et al. (2007) took a sample of formerly mobile business graduates, demonstrating that they became more self-reliant and confident and they improved their sense of initiative by taking part to the program. Crossman and Clarke (2010) extended the research on study abroad to an array of different participants including employers and academics, in addition to university business students. They found that all stakeholder groups were convinced of the existence of a connection between participation in international programs and personal growth, as they mentioned open-mindedness, sense of responsibility, initiative and empathy among the key individual characteristics developed thanks to the experience.

Furthermore, DeGraaf et al. (2013) studied the long-term personal and professional outcomes of mobility on a sample of 354 American students who spent at least a semester abroad. When asked about their individual development as a result of the international experience, they replied that it changed them as persons and it had a great impact on their lives: in fact, they believed that it enhanced their self-efficacy, maturity, global awareness and sense of accomplishment. The authors measured these effects with questions that explored students' changes in personal traits and behaviours, although the assessment was still subjective because it depended on respondents' self-perception.

Similarly, Norris and Gillespie (2009) and Potts (2015) confirmed that learning abroad strongly affects individual growth; in particular, Potts states that the 94% of mobile graduates considered the experience very worthwhile for their maturity and personal development, and most of them rated these two aspects as the top benefits gained.

Finally, other important contributions are the already cited works by Oras Hood et al. (2004; 2008), which provided further evidence on outcomes related to self-development. In the first paper (2004), the authors explained that students believed to be more independent, confident,

open-minded and tolerant of others after their international experience. The more recent work (2008) even emphasized that the largest impact of studying abroad was on participants' personal growth, rather than on their career choices: while many students had already made their choices on professional future before going abroad, almost all of them recognized that the experience was invaluable in terms of self-development and maturation. The researchers reported some respondents' opinions on this point, confirming important gains in personal characteristics such as self-confidence, well-roundedness and independence.

## 2.5 Conclusions

This chapter has presented a review of existing research about the outcomes of study abroad, structuring the analysis on the basis of the three main categories explored in the literature: skills development, influence on future career, and personal growth.

For what regards the impacts on students' competencies, a wide variety of outcomes has been examined in the last decades: alongside with the foreseeable benefits on foreign language proficiency, researchers have also analysed the improvement of intercultural and soft skills due to international mobility. Results obtained in this two areas are encouraging, although less conclusive than those related to language acquisition (because some studies found little evidence about some specific competencies). However, scholars generally agree that participation in study abroad programs fosters the enhancement of multicultural competence, a concept that has been studied from different perspectives across years in order to identify the dimensions that should be included in its domain (some examples are the models by Gertsen, 1990, and by Earley and Ang, 2003). Following different theoretical approaches, researchers measured the effect of study abroad especially on skills such as cultural awareness (e.g. Black and Duhon, 2006), cross-cultural adaptability (e.g. Chang et al., 2013) and cross-cultural communication (e.g. Orahod et al., 2004). Most studies confirmed that mobility is important for students to increase the ability to deal with new cultural contexts, to better understand differences in values and behaviours, and to engage in conversations with people from foreign countries. Nevertheless, the extent to which participants gain these skills often depends on the quality of interactions and on the level of exposure to the new culture, as warned by some scholars (Varela and Gatlin-Watts, 2014; Williams, 2005).

The growing importance of soft skills in today's labour market has led scholars to investigate also the impacts on this field, with mainly positive findings (see for example Crossman and Clarke, 2010; Orahod et al., 2004). Learning mobility, indeed, promotes the development of



many competences relevant for employment, such as problem-solving, communication skills, teamwork, leadership, analytical skills, flexibility and creativity. This area of outcome has been examined in depth by European studies on the Erasmus (European Commission, 2019; Bracht et al., 2006), since one of the key objectives of the Programme is to enhance students' employability.

Subsequently, the analysis has focused on the literature concerning the career consequences of study abroad, a stream of research that has expanded especially during the last decade. More specifically, the two main categories of outcomes under review were career internationalisation and career choices. There is general consensus among scholars that "mobility calls mobility", that is, participation in study abroad programs often predicts a future international career path. Indeed, empirical works in Europe (for example by Parey and Waldinger, 2010; Teichler, 2011), North America (e.g. Norris and Gillespie, 2009) and Australia (e.g. Potts, 2015) have estimated that the probability to have a job with an international dimension is higher for former mobile students than for non-mobiles. The vast majority of findings on the influence of study abroad on career decisions is positive as well. Although the impacts have been measured primarily through subjective assessments (which can represent a potential limitation), researchers report that students perceive their mobility experience as very relevant for their vocational identity. In this sense, the study by Kronholz and Osborn (2016) is one of the most revealing because it provides evidence that participation in mobility programs leads to a better understanding of professional goals, values and interests.

Finally, the last paragraph was dedicated to the body of literature that examined the effects on personal development. Also in this case, the studies under review are based on students' self-assessment and hence no objective observation of the effects is possible; the only exception is the European Commission's work on the Erasmus programme, that went beyond perceptual surveys by using also a psychometrical tool (European Commission 2014; 2019). Overall, scholars found that students often rate personal growth and maturation as the most important outcomes of their experience; in particular, study abroad is related to significant improvements in personal characteristics such as self-confidence, independence and open-mindedness (see for example Orahoud et al., 2008; DeGraaf et al., 2013).



## RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND DESIGN

Previous chapters were dedicated to the analysis of the topic of international student mobility, first with the presentation of this phenomenon and the description of its main current trends, and subsequently with an overview of the literature that illustrated the most important outcomes of study abroad. It is now necessary to further investigate the issue through an empirical research, in order to verify whether previous scholarly findings about the effectiveness of international mobility programs are actually confirmed also in our context, and also with the aim to add new perspectives on this topic of growing interest. Specifically, we will do so by introducing some models on the relationship between international experiences and professional development, which will be tested empirically in the next chapter with the results of a study that we conducted on a sample of business graduates at the University of Padova.

### 3.1 Rationale and contributions of the present research

Our study aims to contribute to the existing literature on the impacts of study abroad in many ways. As seen in Chapter Two, the body of research related to this topic has increased substantially in the last decades and scholars have investigated a variety of outcomes on participants in mobility programs. However, we also underlined that some areas have been more emphasized than others: empirical work has focused predominantly on the impacts on personal development and skills' acquisition, while career outcomes have been examined only in more recent years. For this reason, scholars agree on the need for further research on the effects of study abroad on career development: for example, Roy et al. (2018) suggest to track mobile students after graduation, in order to check the professional consequences of mobility programs. Franklin (2010), too, highlights the opportunity for advancing empirical research by exploring outcomes on participants through surveys made several years after their mobility experience. Moreover, DeGraaf et al. (2013) note that most studies focus on the short-term personal impacts of study abroad while the long-term effects (also related to former students' professional development) remain insufficiently addressed by literature. According to these considerations it becomes important to provide further insights on how an international pro-

gram influences future career. For this purpose, we decided to include in the present research an in-depth analysis of the professional outcomes of study abroad. We will analyse graduates' career by measuring its degree of internationalization, in order to understand if participation in different exchange programmes influences the probability to work subsequently in a foreign country, and so if it helps students to make decisions about their future career path.

Another important contribution of our study lies in the investigation of the role of cultural distance and of programs' duration in determining to which extent young people benefit from their international experience. In fact, these two elements have not received sufficient attention in the literature to date, despite it seems interesting and meaningful to understand whether these features actually have an impact. As pointed out in the previous chapter, one of the rare studies that considered cultural distance was conducted by Varela and Gatlin-Watts (2014). The authors, analysing the development of multicultural competence, found that destination matters because larger gaps between home and host country were associated to greater improvements in the level of skills related to cultural intelligence. Indeed, it seems reasonable to expect that students who are exposed to a very different culture experience stronger benefits than those who choose countries with a lower gap, at least regarding the enhancement of competencies such as adaptability in unfamiliar contexts, openness, flexibility and self-confidence. However, as Varela and Gatlin-Watts (2014) warn, large cultural distances may also create a sense of uneasiness in participants due to the excessive difference in customs and behaviours, hindering their ability to learn and interact with the new culture. For this reason, the researchers suggest to carefully select programs' destination countries in order to balance more challenging opportunities on one side and more comfortable learning contexts on the other. Therefore, since the variable of cultural distance appears to be important for a more complete analysis of the topic of study abroad, we will include it in our models as a predictor. For what regards instead the effects of program's duration, some studies in the literature compared different lengths of the sojourn, indicating that spending a longer period in a foreign country leads to higher advancements in many areas of achievement (e.g. Dwyer, 2004). For instance, Behrnd and Porzelt (2012) found that the length of the program significantly matters in determining the level of intercultural competence gained by students. Anyway, empirical work analysing this issue is still insufficient: to address this gap, we will add duration among the variables of our models, so that we will have a more thorough framework.

Since we decided to evaluate how the different characteristics of a program affect graduates, we will not focus only on one single type of international experience, but we will consider in-

stead an array of study abroad initiatives (in our case, those offered by the University of Padova and the Department of Economics and Management). This is a further element of distinction with past studies, which rarely compared samples of students who participated to different international activities. Namely, this represents one of the directions for future research that scholars suggest more frequently: for example, according to Potts (2015, p.14) “the implications of increasing diversity in program types, durations, and destinations for learning abroad outcomes” should be examined more in detail in order to expand knowledge about the impacts of international mobility. Also DeGraaf et al. (2013) recommend further studies to address such issues as the effects of location and length of time spent abroad, to increase our understanding about the factors that improve the experience and its long-term consequences. Moreover, the analysis of programs’ different features and of their potential implications in terms of outcomes can be helpful also for higher education institutions, in order to design study abroad initiatives in the most purposeful way. Today universities provide a widening range of mobility activities that go from few weeks to entire semesters of sojourn in a foreign country, and such agreements are signed with partner institutions from all over the world. Therefore, now it is more important than ever to recognize whether and how different types of international programs affect students personally and professionally, in order to help them make the right decision about a mobility experience and to continuously improve the effectiveness of these activities.

### **3.2 Research question and proposed models**

This study focuses on the following research question: which is the impact of study abroad programs’ characteristics and of pre-graduation international experiences on (i) students’ degree of career internationalization, and (ii) the development of relevant skills in the labour market. Concerning point (i), after having understood the quality of the main relationship, we want to provide further insights on it by investigating whether the acquisition of specific competencies during the experiences mediates the effect of study abroad on the degree of career internationalization. In order to answer to these questions, a set of models will be presented in the following analysis.

Our first objective is to verify if the way in which a study abroad program is designed (hence, its length and the destination country), together with the number of exchanges at university and the level of past exposure to international activities, significantly affect the degree of cur-

rent career internationalization. We will do so by proposing the first linear regression model, which is shown in Figure 3.1.

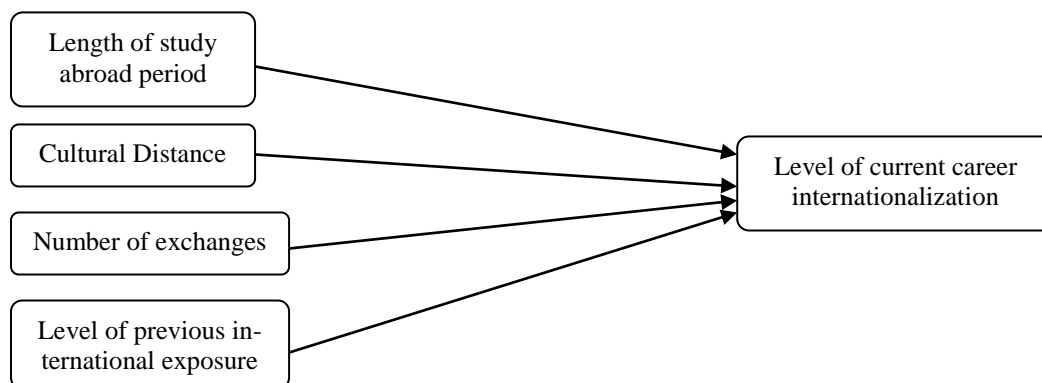


Figure 3.1 - Multiple linear regression model n.1

Although the focus of our work mainly regards the effects of the study abroad programs in which respondents participated during their master's course, we wanted to add a fourth explanatory variable (*Level of previous international exposure*) in order to have a more complete framework of the international activities experienced by graduates on the whole. In this manner, we can evaluate in a comprehensive way the influence of internationalization before entering the labour market on the extent to which individuals follow then a globally-oriented professional path.

This linear regression model will allow us to check the strength and direction of the impact of each variable on the degree of current career internationalization, leading to a first understanding of the main relationship under examination in our research.

Subsequently, the empirical analysis will turn to the investigation of a second type of outcome, which is graduates' level of competencies. As this chapter will further explain, the choice of the skills to be included in the models was related to a research that we conducted on the most valuable competencies in the labour market nowadays, considering the global trends related to employability and to job requirements. The objective is to understand whether differences in study abroad programs (and participation in other previous international experiences) determine the degree by which an individual develops three skills: Analytical thinking, Continuous learning orientation, and Ethical and responsible behaviour. The relationship between the independent variables and each competence is examined in three different linear regression models, which are presented in Figures 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4.

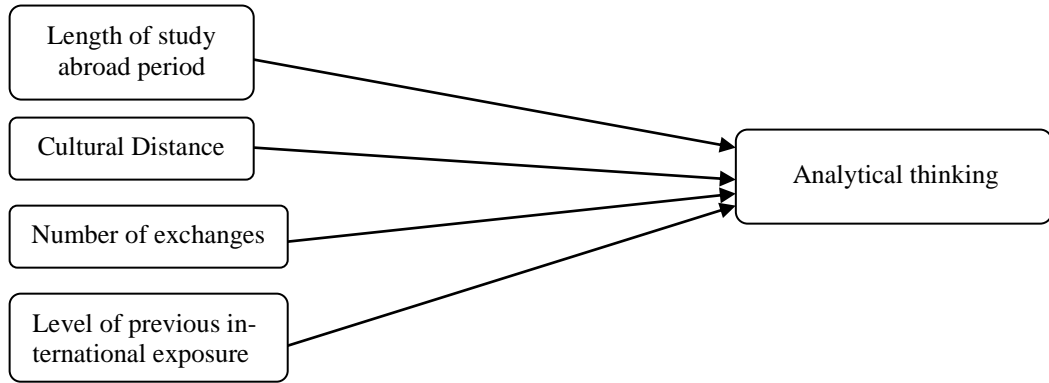


Figure 3.2 - Multiple linear regression model n.2

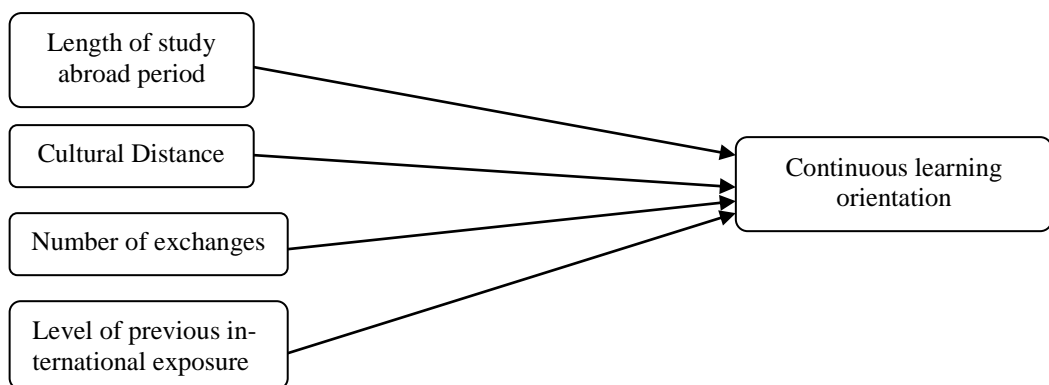


Figure 3.3 - Multiple linear regression model n.3

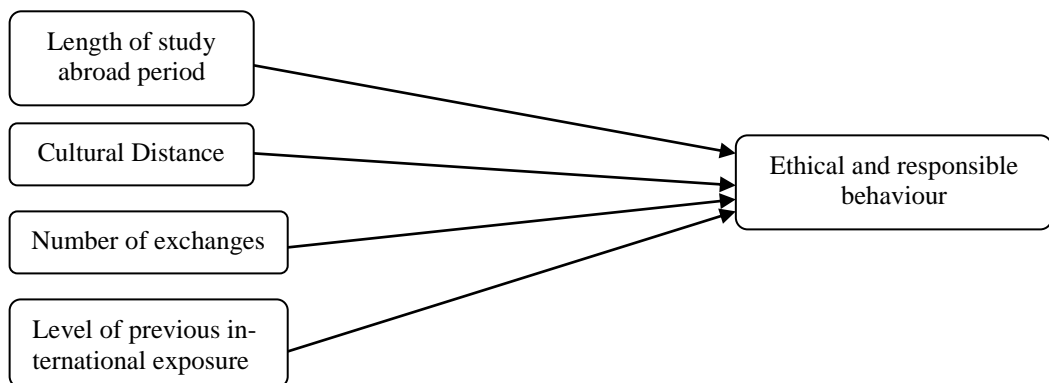


Figure 3.4 - Multiple linear regression model n.4

After having explored the main effects of predictors on the dependent variables, we will complete our empirical research with a mediation analysis in order to examine more in depth the relationship considered in Model n.1. Specifically, we will determine whether the impact of each explanatory variable on the degree of career internationalization is mediated by the effect

of two kinds of competencies that can be acquired during the experiences: intercultural openness on one side, and career-related skills on the other.

Figures 3.5 and 3.6 give a general overview of the two types of mediation models that will be performed. Figure 3.5 shows an example of the simple mediation that will study how each independent variable  $X$  (singularly taken) affects the degree of career internationalization ( $Y$ ) through the mediating effect of Intercultural Openness ( $M$ ). Figure 3.6, instead, represents the multiple mediation models that will again analyse the relationship between each predictor  $X$  and the same response  $Y$ , but taking now as mediators the three different dimensions of career capital: knowing-why, knowing-whom and knowing how.

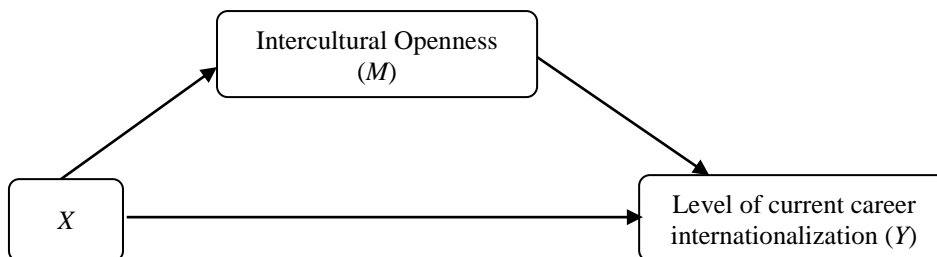


Figure 3.5 - Simple mediation model with  $M$ =Intercultural Openness

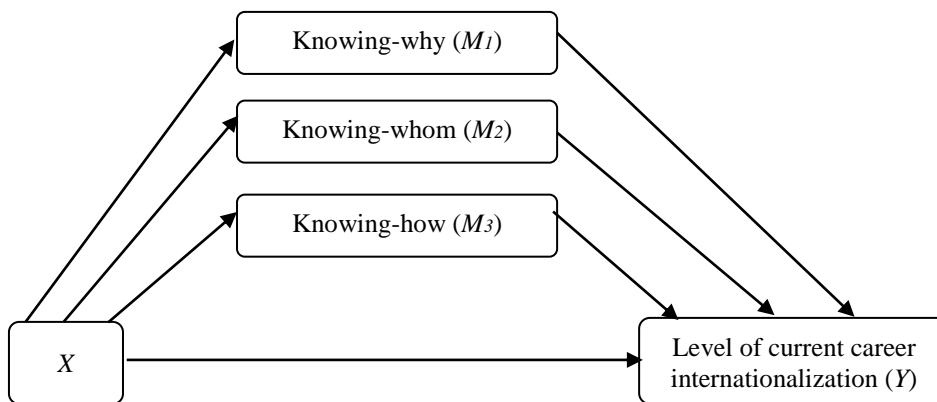


Figure 3.6 - Multiple mediation model with  $M_i$  = Career capital dimensions

### 3.3 Research design: data and methodology

The present research is based on data collected from masters' graduates of the Department of Economics and Management “Marco Fanno” (dSEA) of the University of Padova (UniPD). The Department is characterized by a high degree of internationalization and in years it has developed a strong network of partnerships with top-rated universities, not only in Europe but also in America and in Asia: specifically, it counts 64 partners in the European Union and 11



partners extra-EU. This allows to provide students with a wide variety of opportunities to study abroad during their academic career, both in the bachelors and in the masters programmes.

The Table 3.1 contains an overview of the international activities offered to masters' students of dSEA, who were chosen as a sample for our research, by the Department and by the University of Padova (which benefits from bilateral agreements with foreign institutions).

According to data of dSEA International Office, annually an average of 230 students enrolled in the Department spend a period abroad and mobility concerns more masters' students (56%) than those attending a bachelor degree (34%).

*Table 3.1 - International programs for masters' students offered by dSEA and UniPD*

<b>Programs</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>Destinations</b>
Erasmus+	3 to 12 months	✓ EU countries participating to the Programme
Double Degrees	two semesters	✓ ESC Clermont Business School - FRANCE ✓ Baruch College, New York - U.S.
Overseas Exchanges	one semester	✓ Ross Business School, University of Michigan - U.S. ✓ Rajagiri School of Business - INDIA ✓ Universidad del Rosario - COLOMBIA ✓ National Tsing Hua University - TAIWAN ✓ The Chinese University of Hong Kong - CHINA ✓ Shanghai University of Finance and Economics - CHINA ✓ National Research University Higher School of Economics - RUSSIA
International Summer Programmes in Management (ISPM)	5 weeks (U.S.) 2 weeks (China)	✓ University of Michigan, Dearborn - U.S. ✓ University of Guangzhou - CHINA
Bilateral Agreements (UniPD)	one semester	✓ Boston University - U.S. ✓ University of New South Wales, Sydney - AUSTRALIA ✓ University of Moscow - RUSSIA ✓ Consortium of Brazilian universities - BRAZIL ✓ Guangzhou University - CHINA

As already anticipated, the objective of this research is to analyse the impact of study abroad on graduates' professional development, testing the effectiveness of these programs in the long-term and also evaluating whether differences in terms of duration and destination affect

outcomes significantly. In order to do this, we designed our study in a way that enabled us to investigate several types of effects of a wide range of international activities: our sample, indeed, is composed by people who took part in different mobility programs, and questions addressed personal and professional impacts of their experience. The main features of the sample and the research method will be described more in detail in the following sections.

### 3.3.1 Characteristics of the sample

The sample for our study consists of masters' graduates who enrolled in a master course of the Department of Economics and Management between academic years 2011/2012 and 2017/2018, and who took part in an international mobility program offered by dSEA or UniPD. The link to the research questionnaire was e-mailed to 457 people and we achieved a response rate of 40%, with 183 questionnaires returned. 14 respondents were excluded because their questionnaires were incomplete.

The final sample was made of 169 graduates and it was composed of 79 males (46.7%) and 90 females (53.3%), with a mean age of 27.84 ( $SD=1.87$ ); concerning participants' marital status, only the 27.2% reported that they were married or cohabiting with the partner at the time of the survey. The majority of respondents completed a master's course taught completely in English (72.8%), with a specialization either in Business Administration or Economics and Finance. On average, participants graduated 2.85 years before the time of the survey ( $SD=1.52$ ). 8 people out of 10 studied abroad through the Erasmus Programme during their academic career: the top three destination countries were Germany (chosen by almost 23% of respondents), Portugal (19%) and France (14%). Summer programmes in USA or in China were also popular: almost 60% of the graduates participated in these intensive exchanges of few weeks consisting in management classes but also, in the case of ISPM China, on company visits. A lower number of individuals, instead, took the opportunity to study abroad with an Overseas or UniPD Exchange (7.1%). Almost 58% of the graduates was mobile only once during university, while the 32.5% participated in two international programmes, usually combining an Erasmus and a ISPM experience; the rest of respondents (9.5%) spent a period abroad three or four times in the overall academic path.

Concerning work situation, graduates in the sample have been working in their current company for 21.18 months on average ( $SD=19.4$ ); their job characteristics are quite broad and varied since they are employed in different functions, with a slight prevalence of consulting activities (27.8%). At the time of the survey, most respondents were working for a multinational firm (68%) with more than 1000 employees (70.4%). Regarding the issue of career in-

ternationalization, the 17.2% of participants reported that they were currently working and living in a foreign country. However, considering respondents who had other work experiences before their present occupation (118 people), we notice that the degree of previous job internationalization is 61.3% on average (SD=30.2). The main characteristics of the sample are summarized in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 - Sample characteristics (N=169)

	N	%		N	%
<b>GENDER</b>			<b>AGE</b>		
Male	79	46.7	24-29	141	83.4
Female	90	53.3	≥ 30	28	16.6
<b>MASTER'S COURSE</b>			<b>INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM</b>		
Business Administration	95	56.2	Erasmus	140	82.8
Economia e Dir. Aziendale	30	17.7	ISPM China	58	34.3
Economia e Finanza	1	0.6	ISPM USA	43	25.4
Economics and Finance	28	16.6	Overseas Exchange	3	1.8
Economia e Diritto	3	1.8	UniPD Exchange	9	5.3
Economia Internazionale	12	7.1			
<b>JOB SENIORITY (months)*</b>			<b>JOB FUNCTION*</b>		
≤ 12	73	43.2	Consulting	47	27.8
13-24	36	21.3	Sales and marketing	31	18.3
25-36	31	18.3	Finance and accounting	39	23.1
37-48	13	7.7	Operations/logistics	14	8.3
≥ 49	16	9.5	R&D	6	3.6
			Other (e.g. HR, IT)	32	18.9
<b>TYPE OF COMPANY*</b>			<b>COMPANY SECTOR*</b>		
Domestic, no activities abroad	17	10.1	Manufacturing	41	24.3
Domestic with export activities	17	10.1	Professional business services	37	21.9
International, based in Italy	20	11.8	Financial services	33	19.5
Multinational	115	68.0	Other services (e.g. retail, R&D)	11	6.5
			Personal services (e.g. education)	2	1.2
			Public administration	5	2.9
			Other	40	23.7
<b>COMPANY DIMENSION*</b>			<b>WORK ABROAD*</b>		
< 250 employees	32	18.9	Yes	29	17.2
250-1000 employees	18	10.7	No	140	82.8
>1000 employees	119	70.4			
<b>NUMBER OF WORK EXPERIENCES**</b>			<b>DEGREE OF JOB INTERNATIONALIZATION***</b>		
≤ 2	132	78.1	0-20%	19	16.1
≥ 3	37	21.9	30-50%	28	23.7
			60-80%	44	37.3
			90-100%	27	22.9

Notes: N= absolute frequency, %= relative frequency;

\*Data referred to respondents' occupation and company where they worked at the time of the survey;

\*\*Data referred to the number of jobs/positions that a worker changed in the same or in different companies during his/her career; \*\*\*Data referred to the overall work experiences that respondents had before their current occupation (N=118).

### 3.3.2 Study procedure

Data for our study were collected by means of a questionnaire that was administered online to participants by e-mail. Support from the International Office of the Department of Economics and Management and from the correspondent Office of the University of Padova was required in order to gather the personal information (i.e. names, e-mail addresses, course of study and academic career) of graduates included in the sample.

The survey was distributed electronically in October 2019, e-mailing the link for the participation in the research to the list of business graduates provided by the International Offices. Participants were informed that a survey was being conducted in the Department in order to evaluate the impacts of study abroad for career development and that the researchers were interested, in particular, in such outcome areas as skills development, professional choices and degree of career internationalization. They were also made aware that their contribution in the study was voluntary and anonymous and that the questionnaire could be completed in 15 minutes on average. A reminder of participation was sent two days before the deadline of the survey, to further invite graduates to answer the questionnaire.

### 3.3.3 The research method: structure of the questionnaire

The research questionnaire was created on Survey Monkey in Italian language and it was structured in 29 questions, divided in the following six sections:

- 1- Education
- 2- International experiences
- 3- Competences
- 4- Career choices
- 5- Career path
- 6- Personal and professional characteristics

The complete questionnaire is reported in the Appendix.

Using such a survey instrument allowed us to ask different types of questions: open-ended, multiple choice and scaled formats were used according to the kind of information required to respondents.

The first group of questions (*Education*) asked general information about master's course and graduation year and a self-assessment on the level of knowledge of foreign languages.

The following section was about the *International experiences* that participants lived during and before their academic career. First, they had to indicate the study abroad program (or pro-

grams) in which they took part at university, specifying also the destination country and the length of sojourn. Thereafter, they were required to assess the frequency by which, before graduation, they had been exposed to other international activities such as: travel abroad for holidays, summer work experiences in a foreign country, family hosting foreign students, etc. Participation to student exchanges during the high school and interactions with people from other countries within a circle of friends complete the range of international experiences considered in this section. These data are useful in order to understand respondents' level of international exposure. As a matter of fact, beyond university study abroad programs, there are other kinds of international experiences that young people can live, which may have a relevant impact on the development of competences and on professional attitudes and choices. Therefore, it was important to include these activities in our investigation, in order to have a more complete picture of the possible factors that can affect graduates' degree of career internationalization and their level of skills.

The third section of the questionnaire was dedicated to the evaluation of respondents' *Competences*: specifically, we considered not only the current level of some particular skills, but also the effect that participation in study abroad programs had on their development. The choice of the competences to be included in the investigation was related to a research that we conducted on the most valuable skills for today's and future employees. Indeed, our aim was to explore whether and how an international experience can foster in participants' the acquisition of the competences whose actual demand is seeing a substantial growth. Consequently, we made reference to the most relevant global reports on the topic in order to understand first the current and future trends related to job requirements, and then to select the skills to focus on in our study. Further support in our choice came from scholarly studies analysing graduates' employability, as it will be explained later on in this paragraph.

The World Economic Forum (2018) reports that the Fourth Industrial Revolution is rapidly changing the labour market and the workforce dynamics all around the world: technological advancement is actually improving the productivity and quality of work on one side, while on the other it is creating the need for wholly new jobs and decreasing the demand for certain roles. Therefore, new types of skills are needed to close the gap with the requirements brought in by the digital and automated technologies. Figure 3.7 compares the top ten competences required in 2018 and those trending in the near future (2022), as outlined in the World Economic Forum's survey.

Figure 3.7 - Comparing skills demand, 2018 vs. 2022

Top ten skills in 2018	Top ten skills in 2022
Analytical thinking and innovation	Analytical thinking and innovation
Complex problem-solving	Active learning and learning strategies
Critical thinking and analysis	Creativity, originality and initiative
Active learning and learning strategies	Technology design and programming
Creativity, originality and initiative	Critical thinking and analysis
Attention to detail, trustworthiness	Complex problem-solving
Emotional intelligence	Leadership and social influence
Reasoning, problem-solving and ideation	Emotional intelligence
Leadership and social influence	Reasoning, problem-solving and ideation
Coordination and time management	Systems analysis and evaluation

Source: World Economic Forum, 2018

From this comparison it turns out that the skills with rising demand are those related to typically “human” abilities, such as: analysing information in a logical way (*Analytical thinking*), using new information for solving problems and making decisions (*Active learning*, *Complex problem-solving*), being creative (*Innovation*, *Creativity*) and managing relationships with others (*Emotional intelligence*, *Leadership*). These are, in fact, the kind of skills that cannot be automated by machines: as technology advances, substituting people in an increasing number of tasks, it becomes fundamental for workers to focus on the improvement of such “soft” skills in order to stay competitive and take advantage of the new opportunities introduced from the digital era. Accordingly, the World Economic Forum states that companies’ human resources functions will have to address this shift in competences by hiring new staff with the relevant skills and by upskilling or reskilling already existing employees.

McKinsey Global Institute’s report on the future of workforce (2018) is also in line with these findings. Specifically, it confirms that automation and the adoption of artificial intelligence technologies are radically transforming the nature of work, changing also the skills’ needs as a consequence. Along with technological competences, the two areas with the sharpest increase in demand by 2030 will be social and emotional skills (+24%) and higher cognitive skills (+8%), similarly to what reported by the World Economic Forum. Namely, the first category includes skills such as leadership, initiative-taking, continuous learning, communication and interpersonal skills; the second one comprises complex information processing, creativity, critical thinking and decision-making.

Previous studies with a specific focus on youth employability (e.g. OECD, 2015; Humburg, Van der Velden and Verhagen, 2013) also underlined the changing landscape in skills requirements, addressing as “21st century skills” the key competences that are needed nowa-

days in virtually all sectors of economy. Humburg, Van der Velden and Verhagen (2013), for example, analysed the major trends in higher education graduates' employability by surveying European employers on the most important characteristics that candidates should possess in order to be recruited. Findings suggest that the top-valued competences are professional expertise (subject-specific knowledge) and interpersonal skills (ability to communicate and work effectively with others); moreover, employers appreciate also innovation and creativity, especially in some occupational fields. Therefore, when hiring graduates companies are now looking not only for technical, job-specific competences, but also for a combination of soft skills such as interpersonal and cognitive capabilities. Similarly, OECD (2015) mentions creativity, critical thinking, social and emotional skills as fundamental for young people to approach the labour market in an effective way.

Going more in detail, we made a research on the competences required to graduates in the field of economics and management, to have a more direct link with the sample of our study. The work by Coetzee (2012) provides deep insights in this context: the author identified eight core skills that business graduates should have in order to be employable, through a comprehensive review of the literature and an extensive survey on South African employers and higher education institutions. These are the results of the study: (1) interactive skills; (2) problem-solving and decision making skills; (3) continuous learning orientation; (4) enterprising skills, involving proactivity in initiating economic activities; (5) presenting and applying information skills; (6) goal-directed behaviour; (7) ethical and responsible behaviour and (8) analytical thinking skills. As one can see, some of these skills recall the ones mentioned by global reports and employability studies, while others instead are new, such as ethical and responsible behaviour. Coetzee (2014) defines it as the capability to always take responsibility for your own actions and to defend and support the values of your profession, organization or community in every situation; it is also linked to the ability to empower and motivate others and to encourage responsible behaviours towards environment and society. This type of skill appears to be of paramount importance today, in light of the increasing public attention on the social and ethical performance of enterprises. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is becoming a key practice in all business sectors, since companies are recognizing more and more that taking initiatives for the benefit of society, culture and environment also boosts competitive advantage.

Finally, the selection process of skills for our research ended by considering one last area: intercultural competencies. The literature review conducted in Chapter Two presented them as one of the most important outcomes of study abroad: the majority of articles found that an in-

international experience was relevant to improve the capability to understand differences between culture and to positively interact with people from different backgrounds. The impact on intercultural competencies has been widely examined by scholars, but the objective of the present research is to provide further insights on this topic by adding the consideration of the effects of location and duration of the programs.

In conclusion, all these considerations led us to include in our research questionnaire the four competences that are listed below, each with its definition and motivation for final inclusion in the investigation.

*1- Analytical thinking:* defined as “skilful logical and critical reasoning and analysis in explaining information and data, and drawing insightful conclusions from the data analysis” (Coetzee, 2014, p.895). It is the first skill that will be required in the future according to the World Economic Forum, and among the top-valued by employees.

*2- Continuous learning orientation:* “cognitive openness towards and awareness of, and proactive engagement in, the process of acquiring new knowledge, skills and abilities throughout one’s life and career in reaction to, and in anticipation of, changing technology and performance criteria” (Coetzee, 2014, p.893). Mentioned in several researches as one of the most important skills, it is a quite comprehensive competence: it can be linked, to a certain extent, also to creativity as it involves also the willingness to gain new knowledge and to seek new ways to learn and improve oneself.

*3- Ethical and responsible behaviour:* “responsible leadership in upholding the code of moral beliefs and values of one’s profession, community and/or workplace in all one does” (Coetzee, 2014, p.895). In light of previous observations on the importance of this skill in the current business context, it seems interesting to understand whether the interaction with different cultures, values and behaviours can lead students to reflect about ethical issues more in depth, fostering responsible actions also in the work environment.

*4- Intercultural competencies:* “the ability [of individuals] to function effectively in another culture” (Gertsen, 1990, p.341). We decided to investigate this area not only for its importance in the literature, but also because we believe that the ability to understand and act in different cultural settings is now more important than ever, given the increasing globalization of the work environment. Since this skills area is quite broad, we took a measurement scale that could be as comprehensive as possible: items regard “intercultural competencies, new international perspectives and dimensions in life, understanding of host countries’ culture, society and economy” (European Commission, 2019, p.86).



In order to evaluate the level of the chosen competences in our sample of graduates, we adopted scales that were already tested with success in other studies, in order to ensure the reliability of our results. They are reported in Table 3.3, which indicates also the source and the number of items for each of them. All scales use a Likert-type format of responses (ranging from 1 to 4 or from 1 to 6), where participants are asked to rate their level of agreement (from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*) with each statement according to their self-assessment. Example of items are provided in the last column of the Table.

Table 3.3 - Measurement scales used for the assessment of competences

Competence	Name of the scale and source	N. items	Example of items
Analytical thinking	Graduate Skills and Attributes Scale (Coetzee, 2014)	4	“I can break information into component parts to see relationships and patterns”
Continuous learning orientation	Graduate Skills and Attributes Scale (Coetzee, 2014)	7	“I am always on the lookout for ways to improve my knowledge and skills, and develop myself as a person”
Ethical and responsible behaviour	Graduate Skills and Attributes Scale (Coetzee, 2014)	5	“I accept responsibility for the results of my decisions and actions”
Intercultural competencies	Intercultural Openness Impact Index (European Commission, 2019)	10	“Being able to interact and work with people from other backgrounds and cultures”

The fourth and fifth sections of the questionnaire were dedicated to the investigation of career outcomes of study abroad, from both a subjective and an objective point of view.

Section Four explores graduates’ *Career choices*, by collecting information on their professional decisions and evaluating to which extent the participation in international programs influenced them. Specifically, respondents were required to make a subjective assessment, through 5-points Likert type questions, of the impact of their study abroad experience on a set of abilities and behaviours that relate to the theory of career capital. This concept refers to the career competencies that an individual can develop, that can be distinguished in three different ways of knowing according to the classification proposed by DeFillippi and Arthur (1994): knowing-why, knowing-how and knowing-whom. Knowing-why competencies reflect the motivations of professional choices and endow an individual with energy and self-confidence in pursuing a career path (Inkson & Arthur, 2001), leading him/her to identify personally with his/her work. Knowing-how competencies refer to the career-relevant and job-related knowledges, skills and understandings, which are needed to perform tasks and activities. Finally, knowing-whom competencies are related to the ability to create a professional network of relationships that can help one’s career development.

Several scholarly studies used the career capital framework to investigate the impact of internationalization on the development of career competencies, considering as determinants either work experiences (as Dickmann and Doherty did in 2008 with a research on the effects of international assignments) or pre-graduation international activities, including study abroad programs (see Felker and Gianecchini, 2015). In our case, we followed this latter approach because we aimed to explore the extent to which participation in international programs before graduation influence subsequent career decisions through the acquisition of knowing-why, knowing-how and knowing-whom competencies. Specifically, our questionnaire adopted the measurement scale developed by Felker and Gianecchini (2015), with nine items related to the three career capital dimensions. In addition, respondents were asked about their level of interest towards an international career immediately after graduation, so that we could understand whether studying abroad is likely to motivate people to work in a foreign country.

The following section of the questionnaire aimed to trace participants' *Career path* from an objective standpoint, focusing in particular on its degree of internationalization. Participants had to indicate (i) whether they work in Italy or in a foreign country and (ii) the level of international activities required by their occupation. The range of options covers all possible degrees of international working experiences, according to the following scale:

- working in Italy, without travelling abroad for work;
- working in Italy, without travelling abroad for work but having contacts with foreign colleagues/clients through Internet or telephone;
- working in Italy and travelling abroad for work occasionally;
- working in Italy and travelling abroad for work regularly;
- working in Italy and moving abroad for work for short periods (up to 6 months);
- working and living in a foreign country, but coming back to Italy regularly (e.g. every week or every 2 weeks);
- working and living in a foreign country.

To have a deeper understanding of respondents' international job experiences, we asked them to indicate also the level of internationalization of their company (i.e. domestic vs multinational company, with or without activities abroad), which is very important in determining the opportunities of a worker to interact in multicultural settings.

This section completes the picture of graduates' career path with a question about the average degree of internationalization of their previous working experiences.

Finally, the last section of the questionnaire gathers respondents' *Personal and professional characteristics*, which can also affect career decisions and paths to some extent. Information about gender, family status, job description and function, type of company where one works (sector and dimension), parents' education level and parents' citizenship were required.

### 3.3.4 Measures

It is now necessary to introduce the measures used to define the variables of the empirical models that were outlined in the beginning of this chapter. What follows is an overview of how the independent, dependent, control variables and mediators are built for the purposes of our statistical analysis.

#### **INDEPENDENT VARIABLES**

In the empirical models that will be tested, the following independent variables ( $X_i$ ) will be taken into consideration:

- *Length of study abroad period*: duration is measured by taking the sum of the number of months that an individual spent in a foreign country during the master's course, due to participation in one or more study abroad programs. This information was made available in the *International experiences* section of the questionnaire, where respondents had to specify the length of the international program/s in which they took part during their academic path.

- *Cultural Distance*: the second independent variable refers to the index developed by Kogut and Singh (1988) on the basis of the Hofstede's model of cultural dimensions. Specifically, Hofstede (1980) analysed the results of a large survey conducted on more than 100 000 employees at IBM between 1967 and 1973 and found that values in the workplace varied significantly across cultures. In particular, differences in national cultures were linked to the following four dimensions:

- ✓ Power Distance, representing the extent to which individuals tolerate and accept inequality among members;
- ✓ Individualism vs Collectivism, expressing individuals' preference for loose vs tight social ties (i.e. caring for themselves and immediate family only vs caring for more extended family groups);
- ✓ Masculinity vs Femininity, reflecting the distribution of roles among genders in society and a culture's preference for either traditionally "masculine" values (e.g. success, asser-

tiveness, competition) or “feminine” values (e.g. caring for others, quality of life, cooperation);

✓ Uncertainty Avoidance, related to the extent to which people feel uncomfortable with ambiguous situations and with the unknown future, hence creating formal rules and norms to face them.

Based on this model and considering Hofstede's country scores for each dimension, Kogut and Singh developed the *Cultural Distance Index* in order to measure the cultural gap between two countries, which is obtained from the result of the following formula:

$$CD_j = \sum_{i=1}^4 \{(I_{ij} - I_{iu})^2 / V_i\} / 4$$

where  $I_{ij}$  represents the index for the  $i$ th cultural dimension and the  $j$ th country;  $V_i$  stands for the variance of the index of the  $i$ th cultural dimension;  $u$  represents the second country considered (United States was the reference country for the authors) and  $CD_j$  is the cultural difference of the  $j$ th country from the  $u$ th country (Kogut and Singh, 1988).

Large values of Cultural Distance indicate that the cultural norms, values and behaviours of the two countries are very different from one another, while small values imply that the two cultures are similar. We included this variable in our models because recent research suggests that mere going abroad for study purposes does not always lead to significant outcomes, because the destination country and the type of interaction with the foreign culture matter a lot in determining the actual learning opportunities for students. Therefore, our objective is to understand the impact (if any) of the Cultural Distance of the host country/countries chosen by participants on the dependent variables. Since respondents may have had more than one mobility experience during the master's course, it is necessary to consider also the different lengths of the programs in order to compute, for each individual, a measure of cultural distance that is as reliable as possible. Consequently, our explanatory variable is obtained in two steps. First, we calculated the cultural distance between Italy and the respondent's destination country for each program he/she participated into at the master's course, by using the Kogut and Singh's formula; second, if the respondent had more than one study abroad experience, we took the weighted average of the different cultural distances, where weights are the number of months spent abroad during each program. In this way, by considering both the distance and the time spent in the host country, we can get a more comprehensive picture of the cultural gap experienced by individuals as a consequence of academic international mobility.

- *Number of exchanges*: this explanatory variable accounts for the number of different study abroad experiences that a respondent lived during his/her master's course. Being abroad multiple times may be indicative of individual preferences and of an inclination towards internationalization already before entering the labour market. Moreover, participating to more than one exchange may favour the development of the competencies that we want to investigate, due to the multiple times in which a student was exposed to new contexts and learning environments.

- *Level of previous international exposure*: this independent variable reflects the degree by which an individual was exposed to international experiences before graduation. Respondents in the questionnaire were required to rate on a 5-points Likert scale (going from "never" to "very often") the frequency with which they lived the following international activities: travel abroad for holidays, summer work experiences in a foreign country, family hosting foreign students, study trips abroad, interactions with people from other countries within a circle of friends, and "other experiences" (to be specified by the respondent). The explanatory variable was measured then by taking the mean of the ratings that each individual assigned to these six international experiences, after having reclassified the scores in the interval 0 (never) - 4 (very often). This variable is meant to summarize the extent to which people in the sample experienced the contact with other cultures through different kinds of activities and beyond the participation in mobility programs at university, by indicating an average value of past international exposure.

## **DEPENDENT VARIABLES**

As previously seen, several regression models will be tested in the empirical analysis. Firstly, we will explore the relationship between the independent variables described above and the degree of career internationalization; this same outcome variable will be also taken into account in simple and multiple mediation analysis. The other models consider instead as responses the level of three different competences: continuous learning orientation, analytical thinking, and ethical and responsible behaviour.

- *Level of current career internationalization*: it is measured by considering two different factors, i.e. the level of international activities required by respondents' current occupation and the level of internationalization of their company. Namely, as already pointed out by Felker and Gianecchini (2015), in order to have a complete picture of the degree of career internationalization it is necessary to evaluate not only the content, but also the context of the job,

because both these elements affect an individual's opportunities to have international work experiences. Working for an international or a multinational company may indeed provide more chances to enjoy a multicultural environment (hence increasing, to a certain extent, the "level of career internationalization" of the employee) than working for a company based and operated only in Italy.

To measure the *Level of current career internationalization*, we asked participants to indicate in the *Career Path* section of the questionnaire the degree of international activities of their job and their firm's internationalization level, choosing among the alternatives showed in Table 3.4. The Table also exhibits the score that we attributed to each option available.

Our dependent variable is obtained by multiplying the scores assigned by each respondent to the two factors: therefore, the values for *Level of current career internationalization* range from 1 to 28 (mean=11.49, SD=8.2).

Table 3.4 - Factors used to measure the *Level of current career internationalization*

Level of international activities of the job	Level of internationalization of the company
1 = working in Italy, without travelling abroad for work	1 = domestic company without international activity
2 = working in Italy, without travelling abroad for work but having contacts with foreign colleagues/clients through Internet or telephone	2 = domestic company with some international activity (export only)
3 = working in Italy and travelling abroad for work occasionally	3 = international company (based in Italy, with some operations and divisions abroad)
4 = working in Italy and travelling abroad for work regularly	4 = multinational company (based in Italy or in another country, with many subsidiaries and customers in Italy and abroad)
5 = working in Italy and moving abroad for work for short periods (up to 6 months)	
6 = working and living in a foreign country, but coming back to Italy regularly (e.g. every week or every 2 weeks)	
7 = working and living in a foreign country	

- Three regression models aim to investigate the relationship between the explanatory variables and graduates' level of three particular skills, which become three dependent variables accordingly: *Analytical thinking*, *Continuous learning orientation* and *Ethical and responsible behaviour*. To measure them, we asked respondents in the survey to indicate their level of agreement (from 1=*strongly disagree* to 6=*strongly agree*) with a set of statements, which are those developed by Coetzee (2014) in her Graduate Skills and Attributes Scale, translated in Italian language. In order to verify the reliability of the scale adopted, we performed a Cronbach's alpha test for each group of items measuring the three competences: in social sci-

ence investigations, high values for alpha (usually, larger than 0.700) indicate the internal consistency of the items included in the scale under consideration. In our case, Cronbach's alpha for Analytical thinking, Continuous learning orientation, and Ethical and responsible behaviour are respectively 0.874, 0.856 and 0.762: these coefficients suggest that the items of the three constructs are highly reliable, and thus that the scales are appropriate.

The list of the items composing the three scales and the results of the Cronbach's alpha tests are available in Table 3.5, together with information about mean and standard deviation for each variable.

Table 3.5 – Analytical thinking, Continuous learning orientation, Ethical and responsible behaviour

Scale	Items	Cronbach's alpha	Mean	Standard deviation
<b>Analytical thinking</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I feel confident in my ability to draw insightful conclusions from numerical data</li> <li>- I can break information into component parts to see relationships and patterns</li> <li>- I can make a rational judgment from analysing information and data</li> <li>- I can give accurate explanations of information and data presented to me</li> </ul>	0.874	4.89	0.75
<b>Continuous learning orientation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I follow up on goals, tasks and assignments to ensure successful completion</li> <li>- I monitor my performance against deadlines and milestones</li> <li>- I make sure that I keep myself up to date on technical knowledge and new developments in my field</li> <li>- I am always on the lookout for ways to improve my knowledge and skills, and develop myself as a person</li> <li>- I know how to ask the right questions to get needed information and to properly size up a situation</li> <li>- I accept and tackle demanding goals with enthusiasm</li> <li>- I make use of developmental or training opportunities to enhance my competencies, knowledge and skills</li> </ul>	0.856	4.98	0.69
<b>Ethical and responsible behaviour</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- I accept responsibility for the results of my decisions and actions</li> <li>- I personally take the credit or blame for the results of my work</li> <li>- I uphold the ethics and values of my profession, community or workplace in all I do</li> <li>- I encourage responsible behaviour towards the community and the environment</li> <li>- I find it easy to provide direction to others, and to motivate and empower them</li> </ul>	0.762	4.94	0.66

## MEDIATORS

The following mediator variables will be introduced in mediation analysis: *Intercultural Openness* in simple models and the three career capital components (*Knowing-why*, *Knowing-how* and *Knowing-whom*) in the multiple models.

- *Intercultural Openness*: the first mediator is measured with the Intercultural Openness Impact Index, developed by the European Commission (2019). The 10 items of the Index are shown in Table 3.6 and refer to a comprehensive set of competencies, knowledges and behaviours necessary to effectively relate with another culture. Respondents had to rate on a 4-points scale (from low to high scores) the benefits they perceived because of participation in international mobility programs. The Table also provides the result of the Cronbach's alpha test that we performed in order to check the scale reliability: the high value obtained (0.856) confirmed the internal consistency of the items. Mean and standard deviation are also shown in the last columns.

Table 3.6 - *Intercultural Openness*

Scale	Items	Cronbach's alpha	Mean	Standard deviation
<b>Intercultural Openness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Being able to interact and work with people from other backgrounds and cultures</li> <li>- Intercultural competencies</li> <li>- Knowledge of the host country's culture, society and economy</li> <li>- Ability to establish long-lasting relationships with people from different countries (actual improvement)</li> <li>- To feel a citizen belonging to a context that goes beyond my national horizon</li> <li>- I have new friends who live abroad</li> <li>- I appreciate more multicultural environments</li> <li>- I feel the need for an international dimension in my everyday life</li> <li>- I learned to take into account cultural perspectives/differences when other have different opinions/ideas</li> <li>- I learned to get along with people who have a different cultural background</li> </ul>	0.856	3.31	0.51

- To measure the other three mediator variables, *Knowing-why*, *Knowing-whom* and *Knowing-how*, we included a question in the *Career Choice* section of the survey in which respondents indicated their level of agreement with 9 statements (three for each variable) on a 5-points scale (from 1=*strongly disagree* to 5=*strongly agree*). The items proposed belong to the scale by Felker and Gianecchini (2015) that evaluates the level of the three dimensions of career capital, and they are referred to improvements that graduates perceived as a result of study abroad. We calculated Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the items related to each of the three



constructs and the tests' results confirmed their internal consistency, suggesting the appropriateness of the scales adopted. Table 3.7 shows the items for each dimension, Cronbach's alpha coefficients, mean and standard deviation of each variable.

Table 3.7 - *Knowing-why, Knowing-whom and Knowing-how*

Scale	Items	Cronbach's alpha	Mean	Standard deviation
<b>Knowing-why</b>	- developing a clear vision about the kind of career I want - being aware of my strengths and weaknesses, of my professional needs and motivations - gaining confidence in my professional prospects	0.743	3.56	0.83
<b>Knowing-whom</b>	- creating friendships with people who work and live in other countries - creating relationships that can support my professional development - learning to create and maintain relationships with people outside of my direct networks of personal and professional knowledge	0.836	3.61	1.00
<b>Knowing-how</b>	- learning a foreign language, which was useful for me to look for a job - acquiring ease in adapting to different lifestyles and cultures - acquiring behavioural skills that have been useful to me to find the job I wanted	0.737	4.01	0.85

## CONTROL VARIABLES

The indicators listed below have been included in the regression models to verify whether they also have an effect in explaining the observed values for the dependent variables. They can be divided into three groups: personal characteristics of respondents, information about their parents and, finally, work-related variables.

The first block of control variables refers to graduates' socio-demographic and educational characteristics:

- *Gender* (dummy variable with "male" = 0, "female" = 1): we decided to control for gender because, although female participation in workforce and in top management roles is increasing, the number of women who pursue international careers remains very low compared to men. Women, indeed, account for only 25% of total international assignments (Brookfield Inc., 2016), a figure that has been growing since the 1980s when they represented the 3% of the total (Adler, 1984), but that still suggests the existence of obstacles for female expatriation. The most cited reasons for the scarce participation of women in global careers are: work-life conflict, caused by the higher responsibilities that women take for family and household tasks compared to their partners (Linehan and Walsh, 2000), and lower organizational opportunities in international management positions due to biases and gender prejudices in selection

processes (Selmer and Leung, 2003). These considerations led us to the decision to control for the effect of gender on the degree of career internationalization.

- *Marital status* (dummy variable with “single” = 0, “married/cohabiting” = 1): this variable may have an important influence on an individual’s decision to pursue an international career. As a matter of fact, researchers suggested that issues related to managing family responsibilities, or at least relationships with partners, are a major concern for expatriates, and again especially for women (Linehan and Walsh, 2000; Harris, 2004). In order to verify the effect of work -family conflicts on the level of career internationalization, we included marital status among the control variables.

- *Years from graduation*: people with higher labour market seniority are likely to have more opportunities for career advancements, and thus more possibilities to get an international job, than those who graduated more recently. For this reason, we controlled for the number of years elapsed from respondents’ graduation at the time of the survey.

- *Master’s degree*: we checked if having completed a master’s course taught completely in English (value of the dummy variable=1) rather than in Italian (value of the dummy variable=0) has an effect on the dependent variables considered. Namely, courses that are more internationally oriented and that offer multicultural learning environments may be important in fostering students’ attitude to pursue international career paths, or in developing some specific types of competences.

Control variables referring to parents’ characteristics include:

- *Parents’ education level* (“primary and/or lower secondary school” = 1, “higher secondary school” = 2, “bachelor’s degree” = 3, “master’s degree or equivalent” = 4, “doctorate/master” = 5): we took the mean of father and mother’s education levels as value for this control variable. Several studies in the literature on the outcomes of study abroad (e.g. Di Pietro, 2012; Felker and Gianecchini, 2015; Parey and Waldinger, 2010) controlled for the effects of this dimension: a better familiar educational background may indeed offer more favourable opportunities to young people, due for example to the higher availability of economic resources.

- *Parents’ citizenship* (“Italian” = 1, “foreign for one parent” = 2, “foreign for both parents” = 3): parents having foreign nationality could provide children with more multicultural experiences and more opportunities for interactions with different cultural environments, which may in turn affect their attitude to follow an international career.

Finally, the last group of control variables refer to professional and organizational characteristics.

- *Company's dimension*: we created a measure of the size of the company where respondents currently work, classifying it in three categories according to the number of employees. Specifically, we assigned value=125 to the category of firms with less than 250 employees; value=625 to those with 250 to 1000 employees; and value=1125 to the category of large companies, with more than 1000 employees. The dimension of the firm indeed may have an influence on the possibilities to get an international job, since larger organizations may be more likely to hold activities or subsidiaries also in foreign countries.
- *Job function*: the function in which an employee works may influence his/her opportunities to work abroad, since not all areas may be equally suitable for international assignments. In order to control for this effect, we added in the models a dummy variable that takes value=1 if the respondent works in consulting, and value=0 in all the other cases.
- *Company's sector*: we created a dummy variable to indicate if an individual works in the manufacturing (value=1) or in services' sector (value=0). Indeed some industries may be more globally oriented than others, influencing as a consequence the possibility of an employee to follow an international career.

### 3.4 Conclusions

This chapter provided a presentation of the general framework of our study, which has the objective to evaluate if and how different types of study abroad and other international experiences influence two dimensions: students' professional path and the development of competences relevant for their career.

Firstly, the original aspects of the research have been introduced, with a focus on its contributions and on the main differences with previous literature about the outcomes of international student mobility.

Afterwards, the regression models that will be tested in Chapter Four have been described. The main relationship under consideration is between the different features of international experiences lived by graduates and the level of their current career internationalization; further analysis on this topic will be provided through several mediation models. Effects of international experiences in terms of skills development will be also explored in our empirical work.

The last paragraph presented the methodology used for research design and data collection. The procedure started by structuring a questionnaire, which was sent by email to a sample of business graduates of the University of Padova who had completed a period abroad during

their academic path. Questions were divided in six sections in order to cover all the dimensions that we were interested to examine empirically: starting from education and personal characteristics, we come to the most important aspects regarding international experiences, graduates' level of skills and career development. Finally, we explained how we built the independent, dependent and control variables of our regression models, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

## EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

The previous chapter framed the structure of our study and introduced the regression models that will be now tested in order to answer to our core research question: do different characteristics of study abroad programs (such as duration and cultural distance) have a significant effect in determining (i) the degree of career internationalization, and (ii) the extent to which students gain valuable skills in the labour market? Moreover, concerning the first type of outcome, is the relationship between study abroad and degree of career internationalization mediated by the acquisition of specific competencies during the programs (i.e. intercultural openness and career capital)?

Chapter Four addresses these important issues by performing a statistical analysis with the IBM SPSS 26 software: results and implications of the study for organizations and higher education institutions will be discussed in the end.

### 4.1 Analytical procedure

The statistical analysis conducted in this chapter is divided in three main parts:

- ✓ first of all, a multiple linear regression will be run to understand the kind of relationship existing between the explanatory variables and the level of career internationalization, which is the main focus of our study;
- ✓ subsequently, three multiple linear regression models will be tested to verify the effects of the independent variables on respondents' acquisition of three skills: Analytical thinking, Continuous learning orientation, and Ethical and responsible behaviour;
- ✓ finally, mediation analysis will be performed to extend the first model. Specifically, we will determine whether predictors influence the Level of career internationalization through the effect of other variables called mediators, which will be Intercultural Openness for simple models and the three career capital dimensions for multiple models.

Before implementing the linear regression, the preliminary step that was necessary to perform consisted in analysing the correlation among all the variables, in order to identify the highly-correlated ones and eliminate them. Namely, highly-correlated variables cause collinearity

problems, that negatively affect the statistical procedures by introducing erratic results. Problematic levels of collinearity usually show up when Pearson correlation index  $> .700$ .

Table 4.1 represents the correlation matrix. As expected, *Age* and *Years from graduation* are strongly correlated (.770): it is reasonable to think that older people graduated more years ago. Therefore, we removed *Age* from our models because we believed that differences in the degree of career internationalization and in the level of competences acquired can be better explained by considering the time elapsed from graduation (and thus, from study abroad experiences), rather than by simply accounting for participants' age (which can highly vary among graduates in the same academic class).

High correlation occurs also between *Intercultural Openness* and *Knowing-whom* (.734): however, we decided to keep both variables since they intervene as mediators in distinct models.

Table 4.1 – Means, standard deviations (SD) and intercorrelations of variables

	MEAN	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 Gender	0,53	0,5	1									
2 Marital status	0,27	0,45	0,040	1								
3 Age	27,84	1,87	-0,124	,223**	1							
4 Years from graduation	2,85	1,52	0,022	,291**	,770**	1						
5 Master's degree	0,73	0,45	-0,067	-,194*	-,543**	-,537**	1					
6 Parents' education level	2,34	0,96	-0,091	-0,062	0,018	0,093	0,021	1				
7 Parents' citizenship	1,04	0,27	-0,075	-0,092	-0,022	-0,085	0,044	-0,008	1			
8 Company's dimension	882,4	397,56	-0,110	-0,078	0,028	0,022	0,028	0,028	0,092	1		
9 Company's sector	0,34	0,47	0,091	-0,014	0,108	0,081	-0,126	-0,016	0,029	0,137	1	
10 Job function	0,3	0,46	-,211**	0,061	-0,068	-0,070	,199**	-0,097	-0,005	0,110	-,387**	1
11 N.exchanges	1,32	0,54	-,193*	-0,092	-0,085	-0,093	,191*	0,038	-0,090	0,058	-0,005	0,113
12 Length of study abroad	5,15	3,09	-0,051	-0,090	0,078	-0,136	-0,018	-0,027	-0,060	-0,107	-0,042	0,010
13 Cultural distance	1,36	1,00	-,199**	,198**	-0,002	0,093	-0,026	0,142	0,056	0,104	0,045	0,026
14 Level of previous international exposure	1,25	0,55	,197*	-0,085	-0,043	0,007	-0,102	,295**	0,083	0,112	0,014	-0,033
15 Intercultural Openness	3,31	0,51	0,075	-0,077	-0,061	-0,135	-0,047	0,066	0,039	0,064	-0,019	-0,128
16 Knowing-why	3,56	0,83	-,157*	-0,127	-0,113	-,219**	0,138	0,008	0,028	0,076	-0,072	-0,042
17 Knowing-whom	3,61	1,00	-0,073	-,208**	-0,086	-,161*	0,062	0,073	0,124	0,054	-0,038	-0,035
18 Knowing-how	4,02	0,85	-0,001	-0,027	-0,139	-,178*	-0,020	-0,036	0,057	0,141	-0,023	-0,063
19 Level of current career internationalization	11,49	8,20	-,163*	-0,129	0,127	0,151	-0,100	-0,058	-0,001	,245**	,157*	-0,127
20 Continuous learning orientation	4,98	0,69	0,085	0,069	-0,074	-0,091	0,049	-0,027	-0,014	0,071	-0,043	0,068
21 Analytical thinking	4,89	0,75	-0,147	0,109	0,103	0,147	-0,065	-0,037	-0,009	0,110	0,063	0,024
22 Ethical and responsible behaviour	4,94	0,66	0,102	0,065	-0,057	-0,050	0,068	-0,098	-0,091	-0,066	0,084	-0,068

\*\* correlation is significant at the 0,01 level (2-tailed).

\* correlation is significant at the 0,05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4.1 – Means, standard deviations (SD) and intercorrelations of variables (continues)

	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
1 Gender												
2 Marital status												
3 Age												
4 Years from graduation												
5 Master's degree												
6 Parents' education level												
7 Parents' citizenship												
8 Company's dimension												
9 Company's sector												
10 Job function												
11 N.exchanges	1											
12 Length of study abroad	,306**	1										
13 Cultural distance	-0,012	-,271**	1									
14 Level of previous international exposure	0,041	0,047	-0,044	1								
15 Intercultural Openness	,174*	,240**	0,000	,361**	1							
16 Knowing-why	0,134	,213**	-0,072	0,073	,477**	1						
17 Knowing-whom	,170*	,153*	-0,076	,335**	,734**	,578**	1					
18 Knowing-how	0,080	0,133	-0,107	,214**	,570**	,488**	,574**	1				
19 Level of current career internationalization	,273**	,232**	0,022	0,142	,257**	,172*	,281**	,199**	1			
20 Continuous learning orientation	,162*	-0,045	-0,039	0,108	,315**	,210**	,386**	,295**	0,058	1		
21 Analytical thinking	0,132	-0,061	-0,084	0,047	,194*	0,071	,174*	,198**	0,104	,473**	1	
22 Ethical and responsible behaviour	,154*	0,047	-,168*	,151*	,380**	,250**	,363**	,292**	,207**	,653**	,436**	1

\*\* correlation is significant at the 0,01 level (2-tailed).

\* correlation is significant at the 0,05 level (2-tailed).



At this point, it was possible to start to perform the linear regression models: the statistical software used as a support for our study is IBM SPSS 26, which allows to test also simple and multiple mediation models (that will be introduced later on).

The first model analysed the influence of different independent variables on the response, which is in this case the *Level of current career internationalization*: therefore, we needed to introduce a multiple linear regression model, which can be represented with the following equation:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_i X_i + \varepsilon$$

where  $Y$  is the dependent variable (*Level of current career internationalization*),  $\beta_0$  is the intercept,  $X_i$  are the predictors,  $\beta_i$  are the coefficients of variables  $X_i$ , and  $\varepsilon$  is the error term. The statistical procedure, performed in the SPSS software, consisted in estimating the coefficients of the model with the OLS (ordinary least squares) criterion and then in interpreting them.

Concerning predictors, the procedure required to insert them in the model in blocks, in order to check the additional effect of each group of variables in explaining the variability of  $Y$ . Each block had to be composed by variables of the same type, i.e. variables that are logically consistent with each other. As such, predictors were added in the following order:

- 1) Control variables: Gender, Marital status, Age, Years from graduation, Master's degree, Parents' education level, Parents' citizenship, Company's dimension, Company's sector, Job function;
- 2) Independent variables: Number of exchanges, Length of study abroad period, Cultural Distance, Level of previous international exposure.

Structured in this way, our first multiple regression model investigated simultaneously the impact of four independent variables expressing the different characteristics of study abroad programs and the degree of previous internationalization, in influencing the response, at the same time controlling for the effects of other variables that may be associated to  $Y$  as well.

The second group of models was made of three multiple linear regressions that examined the role of the same independent variables in determining graduates' level of three competencies, which consequently became three different responses ( $Y$ ): Analytical thinking, Continuous learning orientation, and Ethical and responsible behaviour. Each of these three models can be illustrated with the same equation presented above:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_i X_i + \varepsilon$$

where all the terms are defined as in the first model, except for  $Y$  that represents one of the three skills under study. Again, we adopted the OLS method to estimate the coefficients of the model in the statistical software SPSS. Predictors were inserted in blocks to account for the additional effect of each group of variables on the response: in each model, control variables composed the first block and then the four independent variables (*Number of exchanges, Length of study abroad period, Cultural Distance, Level of previous international exposure*) were added in second place.

The multiple linear regression models presented so far allowed to explore the strength of the main relationships existing among the variables of our research. Since the core focus of our work is essentially the impact of international experiences on graduates' professional development, we decided to complete the framework by adding more precise considerations about the type of association existing between the predictors and the level of current career internationalization. We did so by introducing additional variables in Model n.1 that are supposed to intervene in the main relationship by mediating the effect of  $X_i$  on  $Y$ . This statistical method is called mediation analysis and can be performed either in its most basic form, with a simple mediation model, or in a more complex way through multiple mediation models. We applied both types of analysis, starting from simple mediation.

A simple mediation model is defined as “any causal system in which at least one causal antecedent  $X$  variable is proposed as influencing an outcome  $Y$  through a single intervening variable  $M$ ” (Hayes, 2018 p.78), which is called mediator. In this model, there are two paths by which  $X$  can affect  $Y$ :

- the first path represents the *direct effect* of  $X$  on  $Y$ , because here  $X$  (antecedent variable) directly influences  $Y$  (consequent variable) without passing through  $M$ ;
- the second path is the *indirect* or *mediated effect* of  $X$  on  $Y$ , which represents how  $X$  affects  $Y$  through  $M$ . In this case, there is a causal sequence of effects: first, the antecedent variable  $X$  influences the consequent variable  $M$ , and then the antecedent variable  $M$  influences in turn the consequent variable  $Y$ .

We performed simple mediation analysis in SPSS by using the mediation macro developed by Hayes (2018), which allows to consider only one independent variable  $X$  at the time. This limit forced us to apply several models, one for each independent variable that we want to test: in our case, we took the same four predictors used for the linear regression model (*Number of exchanges, Length of study abroad period, Cultural Distance, Level of previous international exposure*).

Figure 4.1 shows the statistical diagram of our simple mediation analysis: the objective was to understand whether each independent variable  $X$  affects the *Level of current career internationalization* ( $Y$ ) through the mediator variable  $M$ , which is represented by the degree of *Intercultural Openness*. In other words, the model examined whether the relationship between characteristics of study abroad and career internationalization is mediated by the development, due to international experiences, of a skill such as intercultural openness. Moreover, we wanted to determine the extent of the two mediation pathways: the direct path from  $X$  to  $Y$  quantified by  $c'$ , and the indirect path going from  $X$  to  $Y$  through  $M$ , which is quantified by the product between  $a$  and  $b$ . The total effect ( $c$ ) is therefore obtained by the sum of direct and mediated effects:  $c = c' + ab$ .

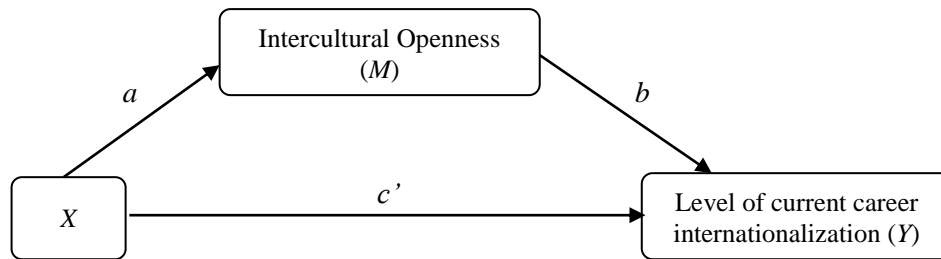


Figure 4.1 - Simple mediation model: statistical diagram

Formally, the simple mediation model can be illustrated with the following two equations (Hayes, 2018):

$$M = i_M + aX + e_M$$

$$Y = i_Y + c'X + bM + e_Y$$

where  $i_M$  and  $i_Y$  represent the regression constants,  $a$ ,  $b$ , and  $c'$  are the regression coefficients just described, and  $e_M$  and  $e_Y$  are error terms.

Using Hayes' mediation macro in SPSS, we added all the necessary variables in the model, including the control variables (here called "covariates") already utilized for the other previous regression analysis. Afterwards, the analytical procedure enabled us to estimate the values of both direct and indirect effects, which will be presented in the next paragraph with the results of the models.

In conclusion, we completed the empirical analysis about the effects of international programs on graduates' professional development by applying some multiple mediation models. Namely, as a last test we aimed at checking whether the main relationship under study is mediated

by changes in graduates' career capital due to international experiences. Since career competencies are three (knowing-why, knowing-whom, knowing-how), we needed a more complex model than the one presented above, in order to account for the effect of X transmitted to Y through three different mediators simultaneously; at the same time, we did not want to consider causal associations between mediator variables. This procedure can be operated with a parallel multiple mediator model, in which an “antecedent variable X is modeled as influencing consequent Y directly as well as indirectly through two or more mediators, with the condition that no mediator causally influences another” (Hayes, 2018 p.149).

The statistical diagram of our multiple mediation models is shown in Figure 4.2. We had to test a model for each independent variable X (*Number of exchanges, Length of study abroad period, Cultural Distance, Level of previous international exposure*), and verify whether its influence on the *Level of current career internationalization (Y)* is affected by knowing-why, knowing-whom and knowing-how (mediators,  $M_i$ ). Direct and indirect mediation paths from X to Y are also displayed in the scheme.

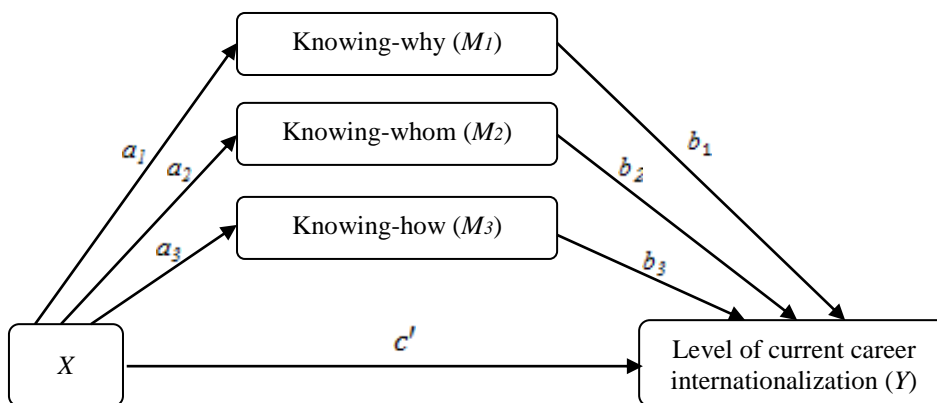


Figure 4.2 - Parallel multiple mediation model: statistical diagram

The equations that summarize the model are in this case four (Hayes, 2018):

$$M_1 = i_{M_1} + a_1X + e_{M_1}$$

$$M_2 = i_{M_2} + a_2X + e_{M_2}$$

$$M_3 = i_{M_3} + a_3X + e_{M_3}$$

$$Y = i_Y + c'X + b_1M_1 + b_2M_2 + b_3M_3 + e_Y$$

where  $i_{M_i}$  and  $i_Y$  are the regression constants,  $a_i$ ,  $b_i$  and  $c'$  are the regression coefficients that can be estimated in SPSS, and  $e_{M_i}$  and  $e_Y$  represent the error terms.

## 4.2 Results

Coherently with the analytical procedure described above, results of the empirical models will be now presented starting from the linear regression models and then moving to simple and multiple mediation. Namely, as underlined by Hayes (2018), mediation analysis can be undertaken only after having successfully demonstrated that X and Y are associated: there would be no point in investigating the mediating effect of other variables if no causal relationship between X and Y was found.

Model n.1 aimed at testing the underlying relationship between participation in different kinds of study abroad programs and in other pre-graduation international experiences, and the degree of career internationalization. Table 4.2 shows the results obtained from the estimation of the multiple linear regression model in SPSS: values of the estimated standardized coefficients and information about their statistical significance at 5% level (occurring when p-value < 0.05) are reported. We made reference to the model obtained after adding the second block of variables (independent variables) in the procedure, which had higher value of adjusted R-squared, that represents a measure of the proportion of variability explained by the regression. Concerning control variables, Gender was found to be statistically significant at 5% level and negatively associated with the response: considering how the dummy variable was built (“male” = 0, “female” = 1), this means that being female implicates having a lower degree of career internationalization, holding constant all the other variables. Unfortunately, this confirms previous literature findings about gender differences: women usually have lower possibilities, with respect to men, to pursue a globally-oriented professional path. As expected, the number of years elapsed from graduation was found to be significant and positively influencing the response variable, meaning that a higher seniority in the labour market is associated with an increase in the level of career internationalization. Also parents’ education level, company’s dimension and job function were statistically significant in this model.

Looking at the independent variables, only the effect of Cultural Distance was not significant at the 5% level. As a matter of fact, the cultural gap between home and destination country of the study abroad programs seem to have no relevant impact on the degree of career internationalization, being instead the number of times that an individual studied abroad and the duration of the programs important in influencing the outcome variable. Namely, Number of exchanges was found to be statistically significant, with a p-value=0.014, and its estimated coefficient was positive: this means that, holding constant all the other variables, completing a higher number of mobility experiences at university leads to an increase in the future level of

career internationalization. Similarly, the effect of Length of the study abroad period was significant ( $p$ -value=0.004) and positively associated with the dependent variable: this confirms that the longer a student stays in a foreign country, the better it is for his/her future international career prospects.

Finally, results showed that also the Level of previous international exposure is a significant predictor of the degree of career internationalization, with a  $p$ -value=0.019. Having experienced international activities before graduation (different from study abroad programs) positively impacts on pursuing an international career path in the future, as explained by the positive sign of the estimated regression coefficient.

Table 4.2 - Standardized coefficients of Model n.1 ( $Y$  = Level of current career internationalization)

	<i>Standardized coefficients (Beta)</i>
<b>CONTROL VARIABLES</b>	
Gender	-.175*
Marital status	-.134
Years from graduation	.238*
Master's degree	.021
Parents' education level	-.191*
Parents' citizenship	-.020
Company's dimension	.215*
Company's sector	.056
Job function	-.183*
<b>INDEPENDENT VARIABLES</b>	
Number of exchanges	.186*
Length of study abroad period	.218*
Cultural Distance	.069
Level of previous international exposure	.178*
Adjusted R-squared = .245	

\*  $p < 0.05$

Results of the estimation in SPSS of the next three multiple regression models about graduates' competencies are shown in Table 4.3, which presents the standardized coefficients and the statistically significant variables at 5% level for each case. Indications about the adjusted R-squared are provided as well at the end of the Table. The dependent variables ( $Y$ ) taken into consideration in the three models were respectively: Analytical thinking (Model n.2), Continuous learning orientation (Model n.3), and Ethical and responsible behaviour (Model n.4).

Concerning Model n.2, little support was found for the effects of predictors on the degree of Analytical thinking developed by graduates. Indeed, only Gender and Cultural Distance were found to be significant at 5% level and both of them had a negative association with the level

of competence (negative standardized beta coefficients). The Number of exchanges was significant only at 10% level, so we decided not consider it in our analysis.

Limited findings derived also from the OLS estimation of Model n.3, which explored the relationship of predictors with the level of Continuous learning orientation. As a matter of fact, only the Number of exchanges during the master's course seem to influence significantly the development of this competence (p-value=0.012). Its estimated regression coefficient was found to be positive, meaning that undertaking more mobility programs leads to an increase in graduates' ability to seek new ways of acquiring knowledge and to be open to opportunities for improvement, which is probably due to the interaction with unfamiliar learning environments.

Finally, multiple regression analysis conducted in Model n.4 provided more encouraging results about the significance of the independent variables (X) we chose. As Table 4.3 shows, among the four predictors only the number of months that a student spent abroad during the master (*Length of study abroad period*) did not to have any effect on the Y, which was in this case the level of Ethical and responsible behaviour. Support was found instead for Number of exchanges, Cultural Distance and Level of previous international exposure: their p-values, respectively of 0.048, 0.050 and 0.012, confirmed that these variables are important in explaining the level of competence developed by an individual. Looking at values of the estimated regression coefficients, while Cultural Distance had a negative relationship with the response, Number of exchanges and Level of previous international exposure displayed positive association with Y. Therefore, holding constant the other variables, learning abroad multiple times and having experienced a higher number of other multicultural activities in the past tends to increase students' awareness of ethical and social issues. This may favour more tolerant, respectful and ethic behaviours towards the communities and the environment and encourage young people to act responsibly in their work context, appreciating cultural differences and motivating others to do so.

Table 4.3 - Standardized coefficients (Beta) of Models n. 2, 3 and 4

	<i>Model n.2</i>	<i>Model n.3</i>	<i>Model n.4</i>
<b>CONTROL VARIABLES</b>			
Gender	-.197*	.101	.008
Marital status	-.133	.126	.134
Years from graduation	.123	-.139	-.015
Master's degree	-.003	-.044	.106
Parents' education level	-.073	-.025	-.142
Parents' citizenship	-.002	-.002	-.079
Company's dimension	.078	.069	-.071
Company's sector	.056	-.043	.082
Job function	-.019	.036	-.078
<b>INDEPENDENT VARIABLES</b>			
Number of exchanges	.154	.216*	.165*
Length of study abroad period	-.137	-.131	-.057
Cultural Distance	-.192*	-.063	-.162*
Level of previous international exposure	.100	.091	.213*
Adjusted R-squared	.052	.015	.065

\* p &lt; 0.05

After having described the results of the OLS estimation of the linear regression models, outcomes of mediation analysis will be introduced in the remainder of this paragraph.

As already remarked, in first place simple mediation was performed in order to extend Model n.1: the purpose was to add new insights by considering whether the development of intercultural skills after the international experiences does actually play a role in mediating the main relationship under study. A model for each of the four predictors ( $X_i$ ) was run, to determine whether each of them influences the *Level of current career internationalization* ( $Y$ ) through the mediator variable *Intercultural Openness* ( $M$ ). Moreover, we considered the same control variables of the previous linear regression models. Direct and indirect mediation paths were computed with SPSS macro: path coefficients for each model, which are available in Table 4.4, represent the expected changes in the consequent variables given a unitary increase of the antecedent variables. Total effects are also shown in the last column. For all the types of effect, significance was tested at 5% level (p-value < 0.05).



Table 4.4 - Simple mediation models: direct, indirect and total effects of  $X_i$  on  $Y$ 

Model n.	$X_i$	Direct Effect	Indirect Effect	Total Effect
5	Number of exchanges	3.34*	.79*	4.13*
6	Length of study abroad period	.57*	.14*	.71*
7	Cultural Distance	-.09	.05	-.04
8	Level of previous international exposure	1.89	1.3*	3.19*

\*  $p < 0.05$ 

Model n.5 is characterized by significant direct and indirect mediation paths from Number of exchanges to Level of career internationalization. On the one hand the direct effect,  $c' = 3.34$ , represents the estimated difference on the degree of career internationalization ( $Y$ ) between two individuals that have the same level of Intercultural Openness ( $M$ ) but that differ by one unit in their Number of exchanges ( $X$ ). The positive value of  $c'$  indicates that participation in more mobility experiences tends to lead to a higher level of career internationalization. Significance for this path was confirmed by a  $p$ -value=0.003. On the other hand the indirect effect was estimated with the so-called bootstrapping technique, which consisted in generating 5000 bootstrap samples and then estimating across all the samples the value of the indirect effects, the standard errors and the 95% confidence intervals. In order to verify the significance of the indirect effect, we had to check that zero was not included in the range of bootstrap confidence intervals. In the present case, the 95% bootstrap confidence interval obtained was [0.2266, 1.5616]: as it is entirely above zero, it was possible to conclude that the indirect path from  $X$  to  $Y$  through  $M$  is statistically significant. The positive indirect effect,  $ab = 0.79$ , means that an increase on the level of career internationalization is expected considering an additional unit of Number of exchanges, as a result of the positive influence of the mediating variable Intercultural Openness. Finally, the total effect combining both direct and indirect mediation paths ( $c = c' + ab = 4.13$ ) was found to be positive and significant at 5% level. Concerning the control variables, gender (-2.75), number of years from graduation (1.27), parents' education level (-1.23) and company's dimension (0.004) were statistically significant on the dependent variable.

Model n.6 was then performed changing only the independent variable  $X$ , which was in this case the Length of study abroad periods. The impact of total duration of all the programs completed during the master's course on the level of career internationalization, through the mediating effect of intercultural openness, was revealed to be positive and significant:  $X$  affected  $Y$  both directly ( $c' = 0.57$ ) and indirectly through  $M$  ( $ab = 0.14$ ). The model's estimated total effect was  $c = c' + ab = 0.71$  and was strongly significant with a  $p$ -value of 0.0002. The

same control variables of Model n.5 were found to be significant in explaining Y: gender (-3.14), number of years from graduation (1.49), parents' education level (-1.17) and company's dimension (0.005).

Results from the estimation of the simple mediation Model n.7, instead, led us to exclude the existence of significant mediation pathways from Cultural Distance (X) to the Level of current career internationalization, passing through Intercultural Openness (M). Indeed, the destination of the study abroad programs completed by an individual during the master seem to have no statistically relevant influence on having an international career in the future: the direct effect of X on Y ( $c' = -0.09$ ) was not significant at 5% level. In addition, cultural distance had no significant direct path to the mediator variable ( $a=0.01$ ), while the direct path between intercultural openness and degree of career internationalization was significant ( $b=4.56$ ). The indirect effect of X on Y through M ( $ab=0.05$ ) was also found to be not significant, as zero was included in the 95% bootstrap confidence interval of the model [-0.31, 0.49].

To conclude, we performed the last simple mediation analysis with Model n.8, considering the Level of previous international exposure as a predictor (X). As shown in Table 4.4, in this case the independent variable influences Y only through the mediating effect of intercultural openness, since the indirect path was statistically significant but the direct one was not. More specifically, the direct effect of past multicultural activities on the degree of career internationalization ( $c' = 1.89$ ) was found to be positive but not significant at 5% level, because the p-value was 0.12. On the other hand, support was found for the mediation effect ( $ab=1.3$ ) which was revealed to be statistically different from 0 through the use of bootstrapping technique (interval 0.49-2.52). Therefore, since  $ab$  is positive, an increase by one unit of X is estimated to lead to an increase in the level of Y, as a consequence of the positive mediating effect of M. The total effect of the Level of previous international exposure on career internationalization was derived by the sum of direct and indirect effect and it was found to be positive and significant with 95% confidence ( $c=c'+ab=3.19$ ). The following control variables had a relevant impact on Y (p-value<0.05): gender (-3.91), marital status (-2.67), number of years from graduation (1.35), parents' education level (-1.55) and company's dimension (0.004).

The last step of our empirical analysis consisted in applying multiple mediation models with the aim to determine whether the effect of independent variables is transmitted to the response ( $Y=Level\ of\ career\ internationalization$ ) through the intervention of three career capital dimensions (*knowing-why, knowing-whom, knowing-how*) that an individual can develop with

an international experience. All the usual control variables were also added in the models, to check their influence on the response. Again, we had to perform four separate analysis, one for each predictor (*Number of exchanges, Length of study abroad period, Cultural Distance and Level of previous international exposure*) due to the limit imposed by Hayes' macro procedure in SPSS. We will present in detail the two models that yielded the most interesting results (n.9 and n.12), considering their statistical diagrams for purposes of clarity in the explanation. At the end, we will give only some hints about models n. 11 and n.10 with a general overview about the outcomes obtained.

Model n.9, outlined in Figure 4.3, explored whether changes in career capital mediate the relationship between the number of study abroad programs in which a graduate participated during his/her master (X), and the Level of current career internationalization (Y). The statistical diagram represents all the direct and indirect mediation paths between the variables: coefficients are provided for each effect, with values in parentheses that show the indirect effects for mediators and the total effect of X on Y.

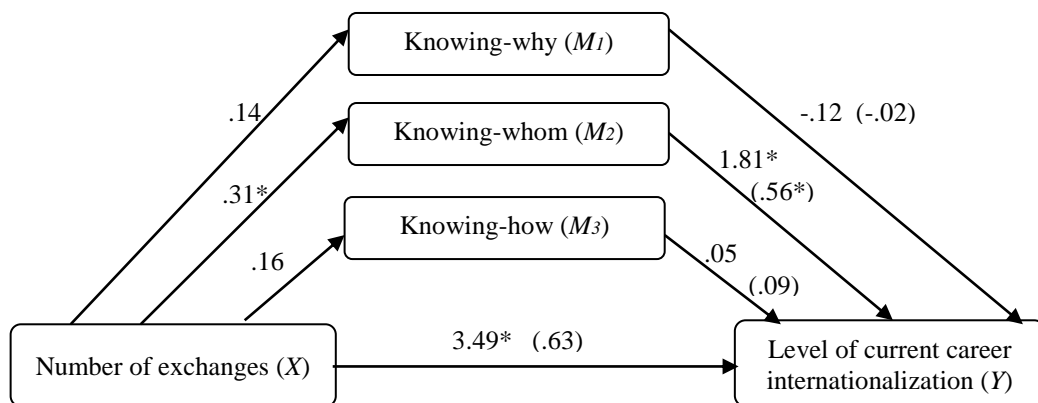


Figure 4.3 - Model n.9: multiple mediation statistical diagram (\*p < 0.05)

Results of this parallel multiple mediation demonstrated that there is a direct effect of the Number of exchanges on the degree of career internationalization, and that it is positive and significant at 5% level (3.49, p-value=0.001). The independent variable also had a significant direct path to Knowing-whom (0.31), while the direct effects on the other two career competencies were not statistically significant (Knowing-why=0.14, Knowing-how=0.16). Among mediators, support for a direct effect on the response was found only for Knowing-whom (1.81). Concerning indirect mediation pathways, Number of exchanges influenced significantly the level of career internationalization only through the effect of Knowing-whom (0.56), but not through Knowing-why (-0.02) and Knowing-how (0.09). These values were obtained by using the bootstrapping test as in simple mediation analysis: 95% confidence intervals es-

estimated for Knowing-why and Knowing-how contained zero, while those obtained for Knowing-whom were above zero (thus indicating statistical significance). The total effect was found to be positive (0.63) but not significant. Regarding control variables, support for the impact on Y was found for the number of years from graduation (1.22), parents' education level (-1.19) and company's dimension (0.004).

A similar analysis was performed in Model n.12 to determine whether the three career competencies intervene in the relationship between the Level of previous international exposure (X) and the degree of career internationalization (Y). Figure 4.4 represents the statistical diagram of the model, indicating the direct path coefficients and, in parentheses, the indirect and total effects.

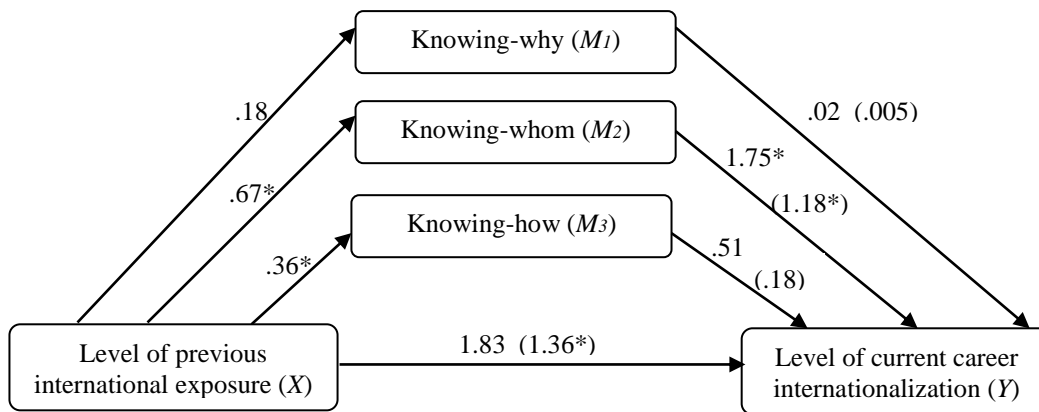


Figure 4.4 - Model n.12: multiple mediation statistical diagram (\*p < 0.05)

As in simple mediation analysis (Model n.8), the direct effect of past multicultural activities on the degree of career internationalization was found to be positive but not significant at 5% level (1.83, p-value=0.14). However, the independent variable had a significant direct path both to Knowing-whom (0.67) and Knowing-how (0.36), but not on Knowing-why (0.18). Among the three mediators, only Knowing-whom was found to have a statistically significant direct effect on the Level of career internationalization (1.75). The model also demonstrated that the Level of previous international exposure influences the degree of career internationalization indirectly through the mediating effect of Knowing-whom (1.18): with a range of bootstrap confidence intervals of [0.13, 2.52], significance at 5% level was respected. Mediation effects of the other two career competencies, instead, were positive but not statistically significant (Knowing-why=0.005, Knowing-how=0.18). Considering all the three mediators, the total indirect effect of X on Y was estimated to be positive and significant (1.36). Con-

cerning control variables, gender (-3.41), number of years from graduation (1.30), parents' education level (-1.49) and company's dimension (0.004) were statistically significant.

Weaker evidences were obtained from analysing the impact of Length of study abroad period (in Model n.10) and of Cultural Distance (in Model n.11) on the Level of current career internationalization, as mediated by the three dimensions of career capital.

Namely, results of Model n.10 showed that the duration of all the study abroad programs completed during the master had only a significant direct path to the response variable (0.64,  $p$ -value $<0.05$ ), while the indirect effects through Knowing-why, Knowing-whom and Knowing-how were all non-significant at 5% level. The total effect of X on Y was found to be positive, but not significant (0.08).

In Model n.11, no direct or indirect effects were found to be significant by studying the influence of Cultural Distance on the degree of career internationalization, meaning that this independent variable probably does not explain the extent to which graduates pursue a globally-oriented professional path after university.

### **4.3 Discussion of results and implications**

The present study aimed at developing some empirical models in order to understand in first place whether differences in study abroad programs' design are important in determining the extent to which graduates then pursue international career paths, and develop valuable soft skills in the labour market. In second place, we wanted to verify whether the influence of study abroad characteristics on the degree of career internationalization is linked to the mediating effect of some specific skills that students may acquire due to mobility (i.e. intercultural openness and career competencies). To have a complete overview on the level by which individuals were exposed to international experiences on the whole, we included also participation in other multicultural activities before graduation as a predictor in our models.

Concerning the first part of our research question, empirical evidences from Model n.1 revealed that what is really important in fostering the pursuit of an international career among young business graduates is the number and length of study abroad programs completed during higher education. Regression analysis showed that the more frequently an individual studied in a foreign country, and the longer one stayed abroad, the more likely he/she is to have a high level of career internationalization in the future. As a matter of fact, by spending multiple periods in different countries students are likely to develop a stronger inclination towards working in a global setting, hence being more open to internationalize their career after grad-

uation. These results support previous research by Potts (2015) who also found that learning abroad multiple times is a positive predictor of working for a company with an international dimension after graduation.

In a similar way, duration of the sojourn significantly impacts on pursuing an international career path. The length of a program is fundamental for students to live a meaningful experience and to deeply interact with people from a different culture in a wholly new environment: for this reason, such opportunities can be viewed as a first experience of "international assignment", thus increasing students' interest towards expatriation in their future work. These results confirm previous scholarly findings about the importance of programs' duration for achieving long-term outcomes. For example Dwyer (2004) underlined that the length of study abroad significantly influences the extent to which young people capture the benefits of the international experience: in this research, full-year programs were the most effective for students, also in terms of impact on subsequent career choices.

Findings showed that another relevant factor that influences the degree of career internationalization is the level of past international exposure. This variable represented all the multicultural activities that an individual may have experienced before graduation, apart from study abroad programs: more or less immersive experiences were included, from travel abroad to summer work in a foreign country and interactions with friends of different cultures. What is interesting is that this kind of activities, although they were performed many years before the present study, still have an effect on respondents' current level of career internationalization. This means that the more an individual has been exposed on the whole to different cultural settings before graduating, the more likely he/she is to consider working outside the home country in the future. This fact is in line with previous research by Felker and Gianecchini (2014) who found that in particular immersion activities, which consist in a deeper involvement with other cultures (such as international work or student exchanges), directly affect the degree by which an individual seeks job opportunities abroad. What is more, our results extend their findings because in our case also some less intense activities (like travel abroad or interaction with foreign students) were part of the predictor variable that was shown to be significant for the level of career internationalization. Therefore, our study suggests that it is the overall degree and frequency by which students get in contact with other cultures, being it in an early stage (pre-graduation experiences) or closer to entry in labour market (study abroad during the master), both through more or less immersive experiences, that build their propensity to pursue an international career. This result is supported by Vance's research (2005), which argued that different kinds of activities taking place during the high school or college,

causing more or less intense involvement with a foreign culture, can be important foundations for a future international career path.

In contrast, the effect of Cultural Distance was found to be not significant on the degree of career internationalization. According to our regression analysis, the extent by which graduates experienced a cultural gap with the host countries of mobility programs does not influence them in having an international job. This result can be explained by the fact that the interest towards pursuing an international career usually arises independently from the country where one has travelled for study purposes, because there is no guarantee that, in case of expatriation or international job, the destination will be the same that the individual selected as a student. Career internationalization is a quite broad concept, that does not directly relate to a specific culture: therefore, when graduates choose to have a global professional path, they are not very likely to consider the cultural gap they experienced during their study abroad programs. The cultural distance perceived by students due to mobility may impact more on their personal development, for example by increasing their awareness of cultural differences and their ability to adapt to other lifestyles and to new situations, as argued by previous research on this topic (e.g. Varela and Gatlin-Watts, 2014).

For what regards the significant control variables, the most interesting considerations can be made about gender, number of years from graduation and company's dimension. Gender had always a significant negative effect on the degree of career internationalization, a result that confirmed previous literature findings on the existence of obstacles for female expatriation (Linehan & Walsh, 2000; Selmer & Leung, 2003). Women continue to experience greater difficulties than men in pursuing an international career path, due to the higher family responsibilities they hold and to gender prejudices that unfortunately still exist in the business environment. As it was reasonable to expect, the number of years from graduation positively influenced the response variable: older employees are likely to have more opportunities for an international job, having more work experience than younger colleagues. Finally, concerning the firm's dimension, larger companies usually provide more international opportunities to their employees with respect to smaller ones, as they are more likely to have activities and operations also in foreign countries.

Therefore considering the two main characteristics of study abroad programs we can conclude that, more than destination per se, duration is what really matters in determining the degree of career internationalization because a longer exposure to different cultures is more likely to affect students' professional attitudes, fostering an interest towards international jobs.

Concerning the presence of significant effects of study abroad and other international activities on the level of competencies acquired by graduates, Models n.2, 3 and 4 provided weaker results than we expected. Their significance in explaining the variability of the outcome was indeed low, as demonstrated by the adjusted R-squared values (always lower than 10%): this means that the predictors we chose probably are not useful in explaining differences in the level of the three soft skills under investigation. A possible justification of this result is the low variability of the outcome variables, which were Analytical thinking, Continuous learning orientation and Ethical and responsible behaviour. Respondents in our sample indeed evaluated themselves with very high scores in all the three competences, almost always with ratings higher than 3 although the scale was on 6-points: means and standard deviations for the three variables were respectively 4.89, 0.75 (Analytical thinking), 4.98, 0.69 (Continuous learning orientation) and 4.94, 0.66 (Ethical and responsible behaviour). Better results can be obtained with higher variability in the independent variables: maybe, more significant differences are likely to emerge if the sample was composed of more heterogeneous groups of students, for example by individuals who did, and did not, participate in study abroad programs. However, this would be the case of an empirical investigation comparing the level of competencies of students who went abroad and who stayed at home, which would address a different research question from the one we concentrated on in the present study.

Another possible explanation of the weak findings could be attributable to the context in which these employability skills are more likely to be developed, that could be different from international student mobility. The three competencies we examined, namely, could be a result of the field of study that an individual chooses (especially in the case of analytical thinking) or of the work environment in which one lives, that could promote their advancement or not. For instance, a soft skill such as continuous learning orientation could be supported by active learning contexts offered in a university course, not necessarily taking place in a foreign country; or it could be also fostered in a company that provides employees with many opportunities for continued training and for the improvement of their knowledge and abilities. Therefore, it could be possible that graduates in our sample achieved high levels of these competencies more as a consequence of their educational path on the whole, or of the work contexts they have experienced so far, rather than by participating in different types of international programs. This idea is recalled also by the research on graduates' employability that refer to the competencies we chose for our study (Coetzee, 2012): authors here underline the importance of integrating such skills in academic courses' curricula, in teaching practices and



also in work-related learning activities that involve partnerships between higher education institutions and employers.

Concerning the second part of our research question - whether the acquisition of competencies mediates the relationship between study abroad characteristics and degree of career internationalization - findings suggest more intense mediation effects for intercultural openness than for career-related skills.

Results from simple mediation analysis revealed that completing a higher number of international experiences (*Number of exchanges*) and staying abroad for longer periods (*Length of study abroad*) positively affect the development of intercultural openness, which in turn favours the pursuit of international career paths among graduates. More specifically, the number of exchanges had significant direct and indirect effects on the level of career internationalization. This means that, beyond the relevant direct impact already demonstrated in the linear regression Model n.1, studying abroad multiple times influences the response also through the mediating effect of the intercultural skills acquired during such experiences. Similarly, a longer duration of study abroad indirectly causes a larger degree of career internationalization, due to the higher levels of intercultural openness developed. These results confirm the wide literature's findings about the effectiveness of mobility for the enhancement of young people's intercultural competencies, in particular those about the fundamental role of programs' duration (Behrnd and Porzelt, 2012; Dwyer, 2004). As a matter of fact, students who spend a period abroad in multiple occasions and who enjoy a longer time of sojourn have the opportunity to interact more with foreign cultures and with people having different backgrounds, living therefore more meaningful and immersive experiences, on the whole, with respect to those who stayed abroad less. This is likely to provide them with better capabilities to deal with international settings, adapt to unfamiliar contexts and be open towards different cultures, which is reflected by the higher level of intercultural skills. In turn, people who are more able to understand and act in another cultural environment are more likely to seek job opportunities in foreign countries, or at least be interested in having international work dimensions in their career (which is represented by higher degrees of career internationalization).

The *Level of previous international exposure* also displayed a strong indirect pathway to the outcome variable, through the mediation of intercultural openness. This supports previous considerations on the importance of the total degree by which an individual was exposed to different cultures for determining his/her propensity towards a global career; it also adds insights on the relevant effect of various types of international experiences for the development

of intercultural skills. As such, the more opportunities one has to relate with other cultures and to deal with life in a foreign country, the more he/she becomes interculturally competent. This leads in turn to a greater inclination towards international work.

Cultural distance instead was not found to have significant direct or indirect pathways to the degree of career internationalization. The absence of a direct effect recalls findings already discussed for Model n.1. However, unexpectedly this variable seem to have no influence on the level of intercultural openness as well: the cultural gap between home and host country did not affect the extent to which students gained such skill. A possible explanation is that all mobile students, independently from the country where they travel, learn to develop intercultural competencies by simply interacting with a culture different from their own. This means that, probably, the ability to act effectively in another cultural context may be developed just as a result of staying abroad, better if on plural occasions or for a longer time (as suggested from the significance of the other independent variables), but no matter how large the cultural differences are.

Concerning control variables, similar results to linear regression analysis were observed for simple mediation. Namely, gender, number of years from graduation and company's dimension were significant in explaining the level of career internationalization in these models as well, with marital status that was also significant in Model n.8. The estimated negative coefficient of this control variable suggests that family responsibilities may be in conflict with the decision to have an international job, as highlighted by previous scholarly studies on this theme (Linehan and Walsh, 2000; Harris, 2004).

Finally, multiple mediation analysis was performed in order to verify the existence of a mediation effect of the three dimensions that build career capital. Findings demonstrated that such effect is partial, because only knowing-whom was found to be a significant mediator in the relationship with the level of career internationalization. Moreover, only the models considering *Number of exchanges* and *Level of previous international exposure* as predictors showed significant pathways through career capital.

In addition to the direct effect discussed above, the number of mobility experiences influences graduates in pursuing an international career also through the acquisition of knowing-whom. Studying abroad in more occasions indeed is likely to foster the development of wider personal networks, which may in turn affect the pursuit of an international career. This process can be explained more in detail as follows. Participation in multiple programs enhances students' ability to create new personal relationships, also with people from other cultures, and to get access to networks that can be useful for their professional development. This competence

is very important for who wants to follow an international career path, since relationship building and communication skills are key for successfully dealing with assignments in foreign countries: therefore, knowing-whom is positively related to international career outcomes. This is especially true in the case of graduates who work in the same country where they studied abroad, because they may leverage on the personal networks they created during their experience at university to pursue professional opportunities. This idea is consistent with scholars' findings demonstrating that people working abroad were more likely to have established relationships that were useful for their career during their mobility program (Norris and Gillespie, 2009).

In a similar way, knowing-whom positively intervened in the relationship between the level of pre-graduation multicultural activities and the degree of career internationalization. A higher exposure to different types of international experiences significantly impacts on the development of such career competence. For example, frequently interacting with people from other countries within a circle of friends, having summer work experiences abroad or hosting foreign students for exchanges is very likely to help students in widening their social networks, which could prove to be useful for pursuing international careers in the future. In this last mediation model the level of previous international exposure had also a significant direct effect on knowing-how, but this was not followed by an influence of this career dimension on the outcome variable. Multicultural activities may indeed favour the accumulation of knowledge and skills that benefit students' future career, but this does not necessarily prompt international jobs because such knowing-how capabilities may be applicable in all the work contexts, being not specific for international assignments (for instance, skills such as creativity, problem-solving, adaptability etc. can be used also in domestic work environments).

The results of the present research discussed so far can have important implications for:

- ✓ organizations, and human resources function in particular, with reference to selection and recruitment processes for international assignments;
- ✓ higher education institutions in the design of study abroad programs.

Concerning the implications for companies, globalization is putting increasing pressure on the human resources (HR) function in dealing with workforce mobility strategies. The ever-changing conditions of the global labour market, presented in Chapter One, require indeed that firms progress quickly in their HR policies.

One of the most important challenges consists in selecting and recruiting the right profiles for international assignments. In general, people who already have a propensity towards working abroad are likely to be the right candidates for international career paths. Apart from that, the

ideal profile should also possess a set of competencies that enable him/her to work effectively in another country, to rapidly adapt to unfamiliar environments and to be open towards different cultural perspectives and mindsets. All these capabilities can be referred to as intercultural skills, an outcome that we treated in the present study.

Our research showed that graduates who participated in more study abroad programs during their master's course and who stayed for longer periods in a foreign country have higher degrees of career internationalization: in other words, they demonstrate a stronger interest towards globally-oriented professional paths. Therefore, companies that have to hire employees for international jobs should look at young graduates who completed multiple and longer experiences abroad during their academic studies, if they want to be more effective in their selection processes. Identifying these potential candidates may indeed optimize HR's efforts, since they are more likely to accept the opportunity of international assignments, having already been abroad in the past for study purposes. Our findings also underlined that duration and number of student exchanges, together with the level of pre-graduation international exposure, have a positive impact on the development of intercultural competencies. This further supports considerations on the convenience, for organizations, to select this type of profiles for international career paths, as they are more likely to possess already the kind of advanced skills that workers need to succeed in cross-borders assignments.

Another important result is that, in addition to intercultural openness, also knowing-whom mediates the relationship between number of exchanges and degree of career internationalization. Hence, companies should select for expatriation graduates who engaged in more study abroad programs also because they are more likely to have gained the ability to create professionally-relevant networks as a result of their multiple experiences abroad. Indeed, the capability to develop and maintain worthwhile relationships also with people from other countries could be very important for dealing well with international assignments.

Our findings provide some significant suggestions for higher education institutions as well. Studying how the different features of mobility programs affect students' professional development, we found that number and length of exchanges impact the most, while cultural distance does not influence the outcome. Consequently, as first thing universities should promote participation in multiple study abroad experiences in order to favour the pursuit of international career paths after graduation, as also suggested by Potts (2015). By doing so, academic institutions will also reach the goal of supporting students in developing valuable competencies for their future career. Namely, learning abroad many times has positive effects on the enhancement of intercultural skills that, as remarked in our research, are becoming increasing-

ly important in today's labour market: due to the fast pace of globalization, companies' HR functions need to recruit people with a high capability to adjust in different cultural settings, especially in case of selection for international assignments. Moreover, we saw that a larger number of mobility experiences brings benefits in terms of knowing-whom: this is a career-capital competence that can significantly help graduates in reaching their professional objectives, especially in the current global (and business) environment which is more and more socially connected. Therefore, by designing academic programs in a proper way and by favouring students' involvement in multicultural initiatives, higher education institutions can play a very important role in facilitating graduates' entry in the labour market. This could be further improved by assisting students in understanding the value of their international experiences for their future employability, as also suggested among others by Orahod (2004) and Jones (2013).

In addition, when designing and creating study abroad opportunities universities should focus on duration, by promoting participation in longer-term programs or by extending if possible the length of sojourn in the foreign country. In this way they will support students' acquisition of higher levels of competencies on one side, and the development of a stronger inclination towards international career paths on the other. As a matter of fact, our study demonstrated that longer exposure to a new and different context is indeed more effective for increasing individuals' abilities to adapt and interact with other cultures, and for bolstering interest in working abroad.

The relative unimportance of cultural distance that resulted from our research may indicate that, in general, benefits of learning abroad are gained independently of the destination country that a student chooses. Consequently, rather than emphasizing the destination of study abroad programs per se, higher education institutions should focus on providing students with more opportunities to spend a period in another country during their academic path, better if for lengthy sojourns. As argued by Potts (2015, p.14), "a variety of experiences in different countries is more important for young graduates than deep experience with one country".



## CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed at addressing an important research question: does the way in which a study abroad program is designed significantly affect graduates' professional development?

Results obtained from data collected on a sample of business graduates of the University of Padova suggest the following considerations:

✓ duration of study abroad programs positively influences the level of career internationalization: the longer students stay in a foreign country, the more likely they are to pursue a cross-border professional path after graduation. Long-term exchanges allow individuals to be more deeply immersed in a different cultural context, leading them to gain more experience in dealing with life in another country: this in turn influences career decisions, fostering an inclination towards international jobs.

✓ the number of exchanges also has a significant effect on the degree of career internationalization. In fact, learning abroad multiple times is a positive predictor of future international work because participation in several study abroad programs can be interpreted as an early sign of interest for global professional settings.

✓ when analysing the likelihood of following a global career path, it is important to take into account individuals' total level of exposure to international contexts, by considering all the multicultural activities experienced before graduation. Therefore, the frequency with which a student had the opportunity to get in contact with other cultures (being these experiences more or less immersive) can be important foundations for future international work.

✓ cultural distance does not affect graduates' level of career internationalization. This may be due to the fact that graduates' propensity towards working in global settings usually arises independently from the cultural gap experienced during the study abroad programs they participated into.

✓ some personal and job-related characteristics influence the extent by which graduates pursue a global career as well. Among them, being female has a negative impact on the level of job internationalization, due to the existence of family-work conflicts and of gender prejudices; seniority in the labour market has instead a positive effect, like the dimension of the company where one works.

✓ differences in programs' characteristics influence to some extent also the level of Analytical thinking, Continuous learning orientation and Ethical and responsible behaviour developed by graduates. However, the weak results observed in these models indicate that these three skills are more likely to be developed in different contexts than study abroad, such as academic or work-related environments.

✓ intercultural openness mediates the relationship of duration of study abroad, number of exchanges and level of previous international exposure with the degree of career internationalization. Staying abroad for longer periods and completing a higher number of international experiences promotes the development of intercultural skills, leading students to improve their ability to understand and act in different cultural settings. Having a more advanced set of intercultural competencies favours in turn the pursuit of global career paths among graduates, since they are likely to be more effective than others in dealing with international jobs.

✓ multiple mediation analysis revealed that, among the three components of career capital, only knowing-whom is a significant mediator in the relationship between predictors and career internationalization. In particular, learning abroad multiple times during university and engaging in more intercultural activities before graduation foster the development of wider personal networks, which can be relevant for one's future career. In turn, the capability to develop and maintain worthwhile relationships also with people from other countries can positively affect the pursuit of global professional paths.

This study presents some limitations that can be addressed in future research. In first place, the small size and composition of our sample (Italian business graduates) can influence outcomes and limit the generalizability of results. Further works may enlarge the number of participants in the investigation and extend it to people coming from different fields of study, or even from different countries, in order to increase confidence in the results and the potential to generalize findings. Moreover, our survey included some retrospective and self-evaluation questions, especially in the section dedicated to respondents' competences. As such, the weak results obtained in the models about the level of three soft skills are likely to be due also to methodological issues: for example, there could be biases related to subjective reports or due to the time elapsed from the experiences under investigation. This problem can be addressed in future studies by introducing more objective methods to measure the level of respondents' competencies, different from self-evaluation. Pre- and post- sojourn data collection may also help in getting a more reliable picture of the actual skills' improvements gained from students.



Despite these limitations, our research can be still considered significant because it enriches the existing literature on study abroad with some insights on how exchange programs should be designed to provide the most substantial benefits to students, in the perspective of favouring a future international career path and of endowing them with the most valuable skills to enter the labour market. Managerial implications of this study for HR functions are also important to be considered, because they can help organizations in responding to the workforce shifts produced by today's global business environment, allowing them to be more effective in selecting, retaining and developing the key talent for international jobs.



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## APPENDIX - RESEARCH QUESTIONNAIRE

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### Programmi internazionali di studio e sviluppo di carriera

#### Formazione

*In questa sezione ti preghiamo di fornirci alcune informazioni sulla tua carriera universitaria.*

1. Quale Corso di Laurea Magistrale hai frequentato?

- Business Administration - Economia e Direzione Aziendale
- Economia e Direzione Aziendale
- Economia e Finanza
- Economics and Finance - Economia e Finanza
- Economia e Diritto
- Economia Internazionale

2. In che anno ti sei laureato? \_\_\_\_\_

3. Indica il tuo livello di conoscenza per ogni lingua che conosci diversa dall'italiano.

	Nessuna conoscenza	Avanzato	Intermedio	Base
Inglese	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Francese	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spagnolo	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tedesco	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Altra lingua: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### Esperienze di studio internazionali

*In questa sezione siamo interessati a raccogliere informazioni riguardanti le esperienze di studio internazionali che hai vissuto.*

4. A quale/i di questi programmi internazionali di studio hai partecipato?

- Erasmus
- ISPM China
- ISPM USA
- Altro programma di scambio Overseas di Dipartimento (ad esempio con Rajagiri, Universidad del Rosario, Ross Business School)
- Programma di scambio di Ateneo (ad esempio con Boston University, Guangzhou, Sydney, University of Moscow)

5. Ti preghiamo di specificare, per ogni programma internazionale a cui hai partecipato, il Paese di destinazione, la durata in mesi e l'anno di partecipazione.

Erasmus (Paese, durata, anno): \_\_\_\_\_

ISPM China (anno): \_\_\_\_\_

ISPM USA (anno): \_\_\_\_\_

Overseas (Paese, durata, anno): \_\_\_\_\_

Altro scambio di Ateneo (Paese, durata, anno): \_\_\_\_\_

6. Nel corso delle tue prime ricerche di lavoro, com'è stata valutata dai selezionatori la tua partecipazione al/ai programma/i internazionale/i di studio?

- Nessun reclutatore/selezionatore mi ha chiesto nulla a riguardo
- Durante il colloquio di selezione mi è stato chiesto di fornire spiegazioni
- E' stato un fattore importante per la mia assunzione

7. Oltre alla partecipazione a uno o più scambi internazionali universitari, indica se hai vissuto una o più delle seguenti esperienze internazionali prima del conseguimento della laurea, e con quale frequenza.

	Mai	Raramente	A volte	Spesso	Molto spesso
Viaggi all'estero per vacanza	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lavori estivi all'estero	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
La mia famiglia ha ospitato studenti stranieri	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Viaggi di studio in un Paese straniero	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Altra esperienza: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. Hai partecipato ad esperienze di scambio durante la scuola superiore?

- Sì
- No

9. Con quale frequenza hai l'opportunità di interagire con persone di culture diverse all'interno della tua cerchia di amici?

- Mai     Raramente     A volte     Spesso     Molto spesso

## Competenze

*Questa sezione è dedicata a valutare le tue **competenze attuali** e quelle che hai **sviluppato** per effetto della tua **partecipazione agli scambi internazionali** durante gli studi universitari.*

10. Valuta quanto ritieni che le seguenti abilità, competenze e conoscenze siano migliorate grazie al programma di studio internazionale a cui hai partecipato, in una scala da 1 (per niente) a 4 (molto).

	1	2	3	4
Abilità di interagire e lavorare con persone di background e culture diverse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Competenze interculturali	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conoscenza della cultura, società ed economia del Paese di destinazione	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Capacità di stabilire relazioni durature con persone di diversi Paesi (miglioramento effettivo)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Percezione di essere un cittadino/una cittadina appartenente a un contesto più ampio del mio semplice Paese	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

11. Che tipo di vantaggi hai sperimentato dalla tua partecipazione al programma di studio internazionale? Indica il tuo livello di accordo con le affermazioni seguenti, in una scala da 1 (per niente d'accordo) a 4 (completamente d'accordo).

	1	2	3	4
Ho nuovi amici che vivono all'estero.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Apprezzo di più gli ambienti multiculturali.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sento il bisogno di una dimensione internazionale nella mia vita quotidiana	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ho imparato a tenere conto delle prospettive culturali quando gli altri hanno opinioni o idee diverse	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ho imparato ad andare d'accordo con persone che hanno un background culturale diverso	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

12. Pensando ai tuoi comportamenti sul lavoro, indica il tuo livello di accordo con le seguenti affermazioni, in una scala da 1 (per niente d'accordo) a 6 (completamente d'accordo).

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Accetto la responsabilità dei risultati delle mie decisioni e azioni	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mi prendo personalmente il merito o la colpa per i risultati del mio lavoro	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Difendo l'etica e i valori della mia professione, comunità o posto di lavoro in tutto ciò che faccio	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Incoraggio un comportamento responsabile nei confronti della comunità e dell'ambiente	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trovo facile fornire indicazioni agli altri, motivarli e potenziarli	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sono fiducioso nella mia capacità di trarre conclusioni approfondite da dati numerici	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Riesco a suddividere le informazioni in parti più piccole per trovare relazioni e schemi	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Riesco ad esprimere giudizi razionali analizzando informazioni e dati	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Riesco a fornire spiegazioni accurate delle informazioni e dei dati che mi vengono presentati	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Porto avanti obiettivi, compiti e incarichi per garantirne la buona riuscita	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Verifico l'andamento delle mie attività rispetto alle scadenze e agli obiettivi intermedi	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mi assicuro di tenermi aggiornato sulle conoscenze tecniche e sui nuovi sviluppi nel mio ambito professionale	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sono sempre alla ricerca di modi per migliorare le mie conoscenze ed abilità e per svilupparmi come persona	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
So come porre le domande giuste per ottenere le informazioni necessarie e per valutare correttamente una situazione	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Accetto e affronto con entusiasmo obiettivi impegnativi	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sfrutto opportunità di sviluppo o formazione per migliorare le mie competenze, conoscenze e abilità	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Scelte di carriera

*In questa sezione vorremmo raccogliere informazioni sulle tue **scelte professionali**, valutando anche gli effetti dei programmi di studio all'estero su di esse.*

13. Al momento della tua laurea, qual era il tuo livello di interesse per una carriera internazionale? Ti preghiamo di scegliere una delle seguenti alternative.

- Dopo la laurea ho cercato lavoro all'estero
- Ero interessato/a a viaggiare all'estero per lavoro, pur restando a vivere in Italia
- Se mi fosse stata offerta una posizione equivalente in Italia e in un Paese straniero di mia scelta, avrei preferito comunque lavorare in Italia
- Non avevo mai pensato di fare una carriera internazionale

14. Siamo interessati a conoscere l'impatto dei programmi internazionali di studio sulle scelte di carriera. Indica il tuo livello di accordo con le frasi seguenti (1 = per niente d'accordo, 5 = completamente d'accordo). Partecipare a un programma internazionale di studio mi ha permesso di...

	1	2	3	4	5
sviluppare una visione chiara del tipo di carriera che desidero	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
conoscere i miei punti di forza e debolezza, bisogni e motivazioni professionali	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
acquisire fiducia nelle mie possibilità professionali	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
creare relazioni di amicizia con persone che lavorano e vivono in altri Paesi	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
creare relazioni utili al mio sviluppo professionale	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
imparare a creare e mantenere relazioni con persone al di fuori delle mie reti dirette di conoscenza personali e professionali	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
imparare una lingua straniera, che mi è stato utile per cercare lavoro	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
acquisire facilità nell'adattarmi a stili di vita e culture diverse dalla mia	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
acquisire delle competenze comportamentali che mi sono state utili per trovare il lavoro che desideravo	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

15. Dove lavori?

- In Italia e non viaggio mai all'estero per lavoro
- In Italia e non viaggio all'estero per lavoro, ma ho frequenti contatti con colleghi o clienti stranieri tramite internet e/o telefono
- In Italia e viaggio occasionalmente all'estero per lavoro
- In Italia e viaggio regolarmente all'estero per lavoro
- In Italia e talvolta mi trasferisco all'estero per lavoro per brevi periodi (fino a 6 mesi)
- In un Paese estero, dove anche vivo
- In un Paese estero, dove anche vivo; torno però in Italia regolarmente (ad esempio ogni settimana, ogni 15 giorni)

Se lavori all'estero, ti preghiamo di specificare in quale Paese: \_\_\_\_\_

16. Qual è il livello di internazionalizzazione della tua azienda?

- Azienda nazionale senza alcuna attività internazionale
- Azienda nazionale con alcune attività internazionali (solo export)
- Azienda internazionale (sede principale in Italia ma con alcune attività e filiali all'estero)
- Azienda multinazionale (sede principale in Italia o in un altro Paese, con molte filiali e clienti in Italia e all'estero)

17. Hai avuto altre esperienze lavorative prima della tua attuale occupazione?

- Sì       No

Se sì, quanti cambiamenti di lavoro/posizione hai vissuto (nella stessa azienda o in aziende diverse)? \_\_\_\_\_

18. Indica il grado di internazionalizzazione delle tue precedenti esperienze lavorative nel loro complesso, in un range da 0% a 100%.

0% \_\_\_\_\_ 100%      \_\_\_ %

## Caratteristiche demografiche e professionali

*In questa sezione desideriamo raccogliere alcune informazioni su aspetti personali che possono influire sulle scelte di carriera.*

19. Anno di nascita: \_\_\_\_\_

20. Genere

- Maschio
- Femmina

21. Stato civile

- Sposato/a o convivente
- Single

22. Occupazione attuale (job title): \_\_\_\_\_

23. Data di inizio dell'attuale occupazione (mm/aa): \_\_\_\_\_

24. Area funzionale:

- Consulenza/Revisione
- Vendite/marketing/customer service
- Amministrazione/finanza
- Produzione/logistica
- Ricerca e sviluppo
- Altro (specificare: \_\_\_\_\_)

25. Settore in cui opera l'azienda:

- Manifatturiero
- Servizi per le imprese (ad es. ICT, consulenza contabile)
- Servizi finanziari (ad es. banche, assicurazioni)
- Altri servizi (ad esempio distribuzione, logistica, ricerca e sviluppo)
- Servizi per le persone (ad esempio istruzione, lavori sociali)
- Pubblica amministrazione
- Altro (specificare: \_\_\_\_\_)

26. Dimensioni dell'azienda:

- Meno di 250 dipendenti
- Tra i 250 e i 1000 dipendenti
- Più di 1000 dipendenti

27. Qual è il titolo di studio di tuo padre?

- Dottorato/master
- Laurea specialistica/magistrale, laurea quadriennale
- Laurea triennale
- Diploma di scuola superiore, scuola professionale
- Scuola dell'obbligo (elementari e/o medie)

28. Qual è il titolo di studio di tua madre?

- Dottorato/master
- Laurea specialistica/magistrale, laurea quadriennale
- Laurea triennale
- Diploma di scuola superiore, scuola professionale
- Scuola dell'obbligo (elementari e/o medie)

29. Qual è la cittadinanza dei tuoi genitori?

- Italiana
- Non italiana per entrambi i genitori
- Non italiana solo per uno dei genitori

Se uno o entrambi i tuoi genitori non hanno la cittadinanza italiana, ti preghiamo di specificare il Paese/i Paesi di provenienza: \_\_\_\_\_



