TEACHER MOBILITY AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: IMPROVING ROMANIAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of teacher mobility and specialized training programs on pedagogical methods in teaching Romanian as a foreign language, focusing on the effects of international experiences and crosscultural exposure on educators' teaching strategies. We examined the role of collaborative networks and exchange programs in facilitating the adoption of new pedagogical practices. Research suggests that teacher mobility promotes the integration of varied and successful instructional methods. Training initiatives effectively connect traditional methodologies with contemporary educational trends, and our research underscores the significance of ongoing professional development for enduring teaching excellence, while providing insights into the challenges and advantages of executing mobility programs in foreign language instruction.

Keywords: *Teacher Mobility, Professional Training, Pedagogical Innovation, Cross-Cultural Education, Romanian as a Foreign Language*

INTRODUCTION

The field of foreign language education has increasingly emphasized *teacher mobility* and *ongoing professional development* as vital components in enhancing instructional quality. In an era of global interconnectedness, foreign language educators are expected not only to impart linguistic knowledge but also to cultivate intercultural competence and foster inclusive learning environments. This is particularly relevant for ***Romanian as a Foreign Language (RFL)*** instruction, which faces specific challenges, including varied learner backgrounds, limited resources, and evolving pedagogical demands (Smith 2018: 45). Learners of RFL often come from highly diverse linguistic and cultural contexts, requiring teachers to adopt flexible, learner-centered approaches that address different proficiency levels, motivations, and expectations.

This study explores how international mobility and specialized training influence teaching strategies in RFL programs. We argue that *teacher mobility* and *targeted*

professional development foster the integration of diverse, effective instructional methods. They bridge conventional approaches with contemporary trends, enhancing teaching excellence and adaptability. Mobility enables educators to engage with innovative practices, such as task-based learning, CLIL, and digital pedagogies, and to reflect critically on their own teaching philosophies.

Teacher mobility represents a response to *global educational trends* that advocate intercultural dialogue, inclusivity, and lifelong learning (Morley 2024: 15). Such mobility experiences contribute not only to individual teacher growth but also to the internationalization of curriculum and the strengthening of institutional partnerships. In Romania, mobility opportunities have grown through participation in European and international programs (e.g., Erasmus+, Fulbright), yet there remain *institutional and cultural factors* that affect their implementation. These include bureaucratic barriers, limited recognition of mobility-acquired competencies in career advancement, and the challenge of integrating new practices within rigid institutional structures.

Moreover, while mobility offers valuable exposure to alternative pedagogical models, the extent to which teachers can apply these innovations upon returning home is often shaped by contextual factors such as administrative support, resource availability, and openness to change within their departments. This study seeks to contribute to the understanding of these dynamics by examining the experiences of RFL teachers who have participated in mobility programs and identifying both the opportunities and constraints they encounter.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Teacher mobility in language education

Teacher mobility encompasses exchange programs, short-term training abroad, job shadowing, and participation in international conferences and workshops. Such experiences expose educators to alternative methodologies, new educational technologies, and diverse classroom management styles. Research shows that educators who engage in mobility programs demonstrate increased use of communicative and task-based teaching methods, along with greater confidence in experimenting with learner-centered approaches (Nguyen 2020: 113). Mobility also encourages reflection on one's own practices through comparison with other educational systems, contributing to professional growth and adaptability (Knight 2004: 8).

2. Professional development and training

Effective professional development models include workshops, mentoring, peer collaboration, and action research initiatives. These forms of structured support are linked to higher teacher self-efficacy and innovation in classroom practices (Johnson 2017: 90). Furthermore, continuous professional development that builds on mobility

experiences can strengthen the long-term impact of international exposure, as it provides teachers with opportunities to consolidate new knowledge and adapt it to their specific contexts (Fullan 2007: 125). Studies highlight that professional development is most impactful when it is sustained over time and embedded within institutional strategies for quality assurance (Lee 2019: 158).

3. Cross-cultural education

Cross-cultural experiences enhance teachers' awareness of cultural diversity and encourage the development of inclusive teaching practices. Teachers who engage in such experiences are more likely to integrate culturally responsive materials, promote intercultural dialogue, and create learning environments that value multiple perspectives (Garcia 2021: 215; Byram 1997: 40). Exposure to different cultural settings helps educators develop empathy and flexibility, qualities that are essential when working with linguistically and culturally diverse learner populations. Such practices have been shown to improve learner motivation and classroom engagement (O'Dowd 2007: 38).

4. Gaps in RFL research

While teacher mobility and professional development have been explored extensively in general language education, relatively few studies examine their combined impact on RFL contexts. Much of the existing research focuses on major international languages, leaving the specific challenges and opportunities of Romanian language instruction underexplored. There is a need for empirical studies that investigate how RFL teachers apply mobility-derived practices, how they adapt innovations to local contexts, and what institutional conditions support or hinder these processes. This study seeks to address this gap by providing evidence from RFL educators who have participated in mobility programs and reflecting on the implications for policy and practice in Romanian language education.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative-quantitative mixed-methods design to explore the teaching practices and intercultural experiences of Romanian as a Foreign Language (RFL) instructors who have participated in international mobility programs.

Participants

The research sample consisted of 15 RFL teachers, all of whom had completed at least one international mobility experience, either for teaching or professional development purposes. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the research objectives. They represented diverse institutions and had varying lengths of teaching experience, ranging from 3 to 20 years.

Data Collection

Data was gathered using three complementary tools:

1. *Semi-structured interviews*, conducted in person or online, which explored teachers' reflections on their international experiences, perceived impact on their teaching practices, and challenges encountered. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and was audiorecorded with participants' consent.
2. *Teaching portfolio analysis*, focusing on lesson plans, teaching materials, and reflective notes. The portfolios provided concrete examples of how teachers integrated intercultural elements into their courses.
3. *Learner surveys*, distributed to students enrolled in the participants' RFL courses. The surveys aimed to capture learners' perceptions regarding the intercultural aspects of the teaching they received, and the effectiveness of the methods used.

DATA ANALYSIS

The interview transcripts and teaching portfolios were analyzed thematically. An inductive coding process was used to identify recurrent themes related to intercultural competence, methodological innovation, and perceived impact of mobility experiences. The codes were then grouped into broader categories through iterative refinement. For the learner surveys, descriptive statistical analysis (frequencies, percentages, means) was applied to summarize students' responses. The combination of qualitative and quantitative data enabled triangulation, enhancing the validity of the findings.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were informed about the aims of the research and provided written consent. Data confidentiality and anonymity were ensured throughout the study.

RESULTS

The findings of this study reveal several significant outcomes related to the impact of international mobility on RFL teachers' professional practices. One of the most notable results was the *enhanced use of communicative and task-based teaching methods*, as reported by most participants. Teachers described a shift towards learner-centered approaches, emphasizing meaningful communication, collaborative activities, and real-life tasks in the classroom (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). This was complemented by *the increased incorporation of authentic materials*, such as videos, podcasts, news articles, and cultural artifacts, which were perceived to improve student engagement and linguistic competence (Guariento & Morley, 2001).

In terms of instructional design, participants demonstrated *greater cultural sensitivity*, often adapting their materials and interactions to better reflect intercultural diversity and promote inclusivity (Byram, 1997; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). Teachers also reported *higher levels of confidence* in their pedagogical choices and a *stronger*

willingness to experiment with innovative practices, as a direct consequence of their exposure to different educational contexts abroad. Common innovations identified included the implementation of *project-based learning* approaches (Beckett & Slater, 2005), *CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) strategies* (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh, 2010), and the *integration of digital tools* such as learning management systems, interactive apps, and collaborative online platforms (Hampel & Stickler, 2015).

Despite these positive outcomes, several *challenges* were consistently mentioned. Many teachers expressed *difficulties in adapting the newly acquired practices to their home institutions*, often citing structural rigidity and resistance to change within their departments (Fullan, 2007). A *lack of sustained administrative support* and limited opportunities for sharing their experiences at institutional level further constrained the impact of their innovations. Finally, participants highlighted the challenge of *balancing mobility opportunities with other professional responsibilities*, including heavy teaching loads and administrative tasks, which sometimes limited their ability to fully implement what they had learned (Knight, 2004).

1. Pedagogical Innovation

Most participants reported that their international mobility experiences inspired significant pedagogical innovations in their teaching practice. A key shift was the integration of communicative language teaching (CLT) and content-based approaches, moving beyond traditional grammartranslation methods (Richards & Rodgers 2014: 50; Coyle, Hood, & Marsh 2010: 25). Teachers described adopting task-based learning activities, simulations, debates, and role plays designed to promote authentic use of language in meaningful contexts (Beckett & Slater 2005: 10). Several participants highlighted their use of CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) strategies, combining language learning with subject matter instruction, which they had observed or practiced during mobility stays (Coyle, Hood, & Marsh 2010: 25). Furthermore, digital resources and collaborative online platforms became more prominent in their teaching repertoire, particularly tools supporting project-based learning and peer interaction (Hampel & Stickler 2015: 60).

2. Cross-Cultural Insights

Teachers consistently noted that international mobility enhanced their cross-cultural awareness and encouraged the adoption of culturally responsive materials (Byram 1997: 45; Liddicoat & Scarino 2013: 90). Many incorporated texts, media, and tasks that reflected diverse cultural perspectives, aiming to make lessons more inclusive and engaging for multilingual, multicultural groups (Garcia & Ruiz 2021: 215). A number of participants designed activities that explicitly promoted intercultural dialogue, such as classroom discussions comparing cultural norms, student presentations on their own traditions, and joint projects with students from other countries using virtual exchange platforms (O'Dowd 2007: 35).

3. Professional Growth

All participants described a clear sense of professional growth following their mobility experiences. They reported feeling more confident in experimenting with innovative practices and adapting teaching methods to suit diverse learner needs (Johnson 2017: 90; Lee 2019: 160). Many participants pointed to an expanded repertoire of teaching strategies, including greater flexibility in classroom management, more varied assessment techniques, and stronger skills in integrating technology into instruction (Knight 2004: 10). Mobility experiences also contributed to a sense of belonging to an international professional community, with participants highlighting the value of networking with colleagues abroad and sharing ideas beyond their local contexts (Fullan 2007: 130).

4. Challenges Identified

Despite these positive developments, participants identified several challenges in implementing new practices acquired during their mobility. Logistical issues — such as limited access to resources, inadequate technology infrastructure, or large class sizes — often constrained the use of more interactive or digital methods (Knight 2004: 12). Teachers also reported frustration with institutional inertia: some felt that their home institutions were resistant to change, with rigid curricula and conservative teaching cultures that left little room for innovation (Fullan 2007: 140). Moreover, participants cited difficulties balancing mobility-derived initiatives with existing professional responsibilities, including heavy teaching loads, administrative tasks, and limited time for curriculum development (Knight 2004: 12). These factors sometimes resulted in only partial or delayed implementation of the new methods and ideas they had gained abroad.

One of the most notable results was the enhanced use of communicative and task-based teaching methods. This finding is illustrated by the experience of one participant, whose case demonstrates both the opportunities and challenges of implementing such methods in practice.

Case Study: Impact of Mobility on a Romanian Language Teacher's Practice

One participant, a Romanian language instructor with over 10 years of experience, shared insights into how a three-month Erasmus+ teaching mobility in Spain transformed her approach to language instruction. Before the mobility experience, her lessons were predominantly grammar-focused, relying heavily on textbook exercises. During her stay abroad, she was exposed to dynamic, learnercentered methodologies emphasizing communicative competence and real-life language use.

Upon returning to Romania, she faced institutional challenges in implementing these innovations but gradually introduced project-based learning and digital resources. She noted an increase in student motivation and engagement as a direct result.

Anonymous interview excerpt:

The mobility experience was eye-opening. I realized how much more effective it is to engage students through meaningful communication rather than rote memorization. However, back home, I struggled with rigid curricula and lack of support. Still, I started small, incorporating group projects and authentic materials, and I could see the difference in my students' enthusiasm and progress."

Extended Summary of Quantitative Data

The learner surveys collected from students enrolled in the courses of participating RFL teachers (N ≈ 300) provided insights into how mobility-informed teaching practices were perceived in the classroom. Key quantitative findings include:

- *Perceived effectiveness of teaching methods*: 82% of learners rated the teaching methods as either "effective" or "very effective" in promoting active language use.
- *Engagement with intercultural content*: 76% of students reported that lessons included culturally diverse materials, and 69% indicated that these materials helped them better understand cultural differences.
- *Motivation and classroom atmosphere*: 85% of learners agreed or strongly agreed that classroom activities (such as group work, projects, or discussions) increased their motivation to learn Romanian.
- *Use of digital tools*: 71% of respondents noted that digital tools (e.g., interactive apps, online platforms) were used regularly in lessons, and 66% felt that these tools enhanced their learning experience.
- *Student satisfaction*: The overall satisfaction rate with the teaching approach was 80%, with many students highlighting the value of real-life tasks and communicative activities.

These results provide quantitative support for the qualitative themes identified in interviews and teaching portfolio analyses, confirming that mobility-derived practices positively influenced learner perceptions of instructional quality.

DISCUSSION

The study confirms that international mobility and professional development contribute to *pedagogical innovation* and *cross-cultural competence*, as participants consistently integrated new teaching strategies and culturally inclusive practices following their experiences abroad. These findings align with prior research suggesting that exposure to different educational contexts broadens teachers' methodological repertoire and fosters greater sensitivity to learner diversity (Nguyen 2020: 115; Garcia & Ruiz 2021: 220).

However, the results also highlight that *institutional support is crucial for sustainable change*. Without adequate administrative backing, resources, and

opportunities for sharing best practices, the impact of teacher mobility risks remains isolated at the individual level (Fullan 2007: 145). Institutions need to establish frameworks that facilitate the dissemination of innovations across departments and encourage collaborative reflection among staff.

In addition, the study underscores the need for *ongoing professional development* that builds on mobility experiences through mentoring, peer exchanges, and follow-up training (Johnson 2017: 95). Teachers emphasized the value of networking and maintaining international contacts as sources of continuous learning.

Future research should examine *long-term impacts on learner outcomes*, particularly how mobility-informed teaching practices affect students' language proficiency, intercultural competence, and motivation over time. Comparative studies between institutions with varying levels of support for teacher mobility could further illuminate structural factors influencing success.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that international teacher mobility and structured professional development initiatives contribute meaningfully to enhancing Romanian as a Foreign Language (RFL) instruction. Participants reported the adoption of innovative and inclusive teaching practices, including the use of communicative tasks, project-based learning, and culturally responsive materials. These changes reflect a shift towards more learner-centered approaches, facilitated by exposure to alternative educational contexts.

The findings suggest that while mobility programs enable teachers to diversify their methodological repertoire and strengthen their intercultural competence, sustained institutional support is essential for ensuring the long-term impact of such experiences. Without appropriate administrative frameworks, resources, and opportunities for sharing best practices, the benefits of mobility tend to remain confined to individual practice rather than contributing to broader institutional change.

To maximize the value of teacher mobility, educational institutions should develop comprehensive strategies that support returning teachers in implementing innovative practices. This includes providing time, resources, mentoring, and platforms for disseminating mobility-acquired knowledge. This study is limited by the relatively small sample size and by its focus on self-reported data. Further research with larger, more diverse samples and longitudinal designs is needed. Future research should explore the long-term effects of mobility-informed pedagogies on student learning outcomes and examine how institutional cultures influence the integration of new practices.

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