

Joint Modules and Internationalisation in Higher Education
Reflections on the Joint Module
“Comparative Studies in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning”

STUDIES IN PEDAGOGY, ANDRAGOGY AND GERONTOLOGY

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Regina Egetenmeyer

Comparative Studies in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning: The Joint-Module Methodology and its Context

Abstract: This paper analyses international contexts of adult education and higher education as a framework for the COMPALL Joint Module. The module is designed to develop international knowledge, comparative research methods, intercultural competences, didactical insights, and networking experiences. The lessons learned also inform joint modules for other subjects.

Introduction

Building on long-standing cooperation between researchers in adult education and universities focussing on research and studies in adult education, the *Joint Module for Comparative Studies in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning* (COMPALL) is being developed as part of the ERASMUS+ Strategic Partnership COMPALL (2015–2018)¹. The origins of the *Joint Module* go back to an initiative developed by Prof Licínio Lima (University of Minho/Portugal) in a seminar on *European Strategies for Lifelong Learning*. This seminar was offered for adult education students at the universities of Duisburg-Essen and Mainz (both in Germany). It was combined with field visits to European stakeholders in Brussels. The seminar was designed to analyse the policy activities of European stakeholders in the field of adult education and lifelong learning. Students were introduced to a policy analysis scheme that was used as an observation tool during the field visits. It helped students understand theoretical models and empirical reality in practice. As part of this project, a study text was developed (Lima & Guimarães, 2011). The need for exchanges between students in adult education from different countries also became obvious. This insight led to the application for an ERASMUS Intensive Programme, in which universities from Chemnitz/Germany, Florence/Italy, Glasgow/Scotland, Lisbon/Portugal, Minho-Braga/Portugal, Pécs/Hungary, and Würzburg/Germany organised a first Winter School on *Comparative Studies in Adult Education and Lifelong Learning* in February

1 Cf COMPALL homepage: <https://www.hw.uni-wuerzburg.de/compall/startseite/>, retrieved 19.09.2017.

2014 at Julius-Maximilian University in Würzburg/Germany. This ERASMUS Intensive Programme was developed in parallel to several international teaching projects in the field of adult and continuing education. The European Master in Adult Education (2004–2017) (Egetenmeyer & Lattke, 2017), as well as European Studies and Research in Adult Education (2013–2016)², were both ERASMUS Curriculum Development Projects initiated by the German Institute for Adult Education (Prof Ekkehard Nuissl von Rein). Based on its practical experiences, DVV International developed and implemented the GLOBALE curriculum for the professionalisation of teachers and trainers in adult education in different countries during that time (Avramoska & Czerwinski, 2017). The need for internationalising adult education studies on the one hand and the strong commitment of the partner universities on the other hand led to a follow-up Winter School in 2015 (Németh, 2017).

Against this background, a partner consortium of seven European universities (Aarhus/Denmark, Florence/Italy, Helmut-Schmidt-University in Hamburg/Germany, Lisbon/Portugal, Padua/Italy, Pécs/Hungary, Würzburg/Germany) took the initiative to develop a Joint-Module-Methodology designed to allow universities to provide an international study programme for their master's and doctoral students in adult education according to their different needs. The consortium was created by universities and adult education professors who strongly appreciated the value of a joint module from an institutional perspective as well. This allowed the deep institutional integration of the *Joint Module* into the curricula of master's and doctoral studies.

This paper places the *Joint Module COMPALL* in its societal contexts: What are developments in the internationalisation of the *Joint Module COMPALL*? Which learning objectives are developed based on this analysis for participants? How is it structured to reach the outlined learning objectives? To answer these questions, the paper analyses the context of internationalisation in adult and continuing education as well as internationalisation in university contexts in Europe. Based on this analysis, it outlines learning objectives for various participants of the *Joint Module COMPALL*. Afterwards, the structure of the *Joint Module Methodology* is analysed with regard to its contribution to these learning objectives. Finally, the paper reflects on the transferability of these results to joint modules in other subjects.

2 Cf ESRALÉ homepage, <https://www.esrale.org>, retrieved 19.09.2017.

The internationalisation of adult and continuing education

This paper understands current political and societal developments as a background for adult and continuing education research and practice, which makes single phenomena in adult and continuing education only understandable as parts of international contexts. Internationalisation in education, adult education, and continuing education – and hence comparisons with other countries – originally provided an impetus for ‘learning from the other’ (Reischmann, 2008). A classic example in the German context is using the perspective of the English University Extension initiative to consider the development of this activity at Germany universities, too. This differentiation between self and the other (country/context/case) is no longer given in this clear-cut fashion. Moreover, international phenomena are now interwoven into ‘national’ situations, cases, and contexts of adult education. Cultural theory discusses concepts of transculturality (Welsch, 2010) or hybrid subjects (Reckwitz, 2006). These concepts support the deconstruction of the dualism between national and international perspectives, emphasising the interwoven perspective of influences of different contexts on a phenomenon. For adult and continuing education, three arguments can be found for this interwoven situation, which are presented in the following. These arguments represent the background in which the employment opportunities of graduates in adult education are integrated.

International and European education policies

Educational issues have traditionally been a national issue and in some countries even a regional one. The 1992 Maastricht treaties (European Communities, 1992), which regulated collaboration in the European Union, even contain a harmonisation ban for educational issues. However, education is understood by international organisations such as the European Union, OECD, and UNESCO as a very important instrument for developing societies. This is why international organisations act in so-called ‘soft-laws’ (Marcussen, 2004; Bieber & Martens, 2011) in educational issues. They convince member countries to agree on the formulation of policies (joint targets) in educational issues. Realising and implementing these targets, however, is the responsibility of the member countries. European policies on adult and continuing education can be found in several EU documents that target lifelong learning and education in general (European Union, 2012) or adult education as a specific area of learning and education (European Union, 2011). But they can also be found in policies, programmes, and benchmarking studies of UNESCO and OECD (e.g. GRALE-Report, PIAAC study). These activities created

some kind of transparency in education between its member countries. But furthermore, the international policies govern national policies. Local developments on qualification frameworks, on the recognition of prior and informal learning, credit systems, on literacy activities or quality management systems are only some examples that are realized at the local level but agreed on at the international level. This is why local activities are interrelated with international developments and only understandable in their international interdependence.

The internationalisation of societies

Local communities and societies as a whole are going through an enormous internationalisation process. On the one hand, this is brought on by the digitalisation of peoples' daily lives. Neither communication nor social relationships, online reading and research, or markets and sale are local or national in nature. Moreover, they are localized through online access and available digital resources. This should not eliminate the borders of duty-free markets, which do not benefit people from all countries. Rather, this argument should focus on other kinds of boundaries and non-boundaries. Furthermore, the free movement of persons between several countries allows citizens of these countries easier mobility. The free movement of persons in the European Union also raises the numbers of people who move to different places for employment reasons (OECD, 2015). But international refugee situations, too, raise migration of people to other places inside and outside of countries. For adult and continuing education, this means that the population becomes more international. But it also means that non-mobile people have more possibilities to interact with people with a migration background. Thereby, the target group of adult and continuing education is becoming more diverse. As adult and continuing education has to adapt deeply to the needs and background of the target group, taking internationalisation into account is a fundamental basis for successful work in adult and continuing education.

The international market for continuing education

The development of international trade agreements and duty-free markets also enables and supports the provision of services as continuing education. As part of the iMove project, the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research has initiated a platform to support German providers of continuing education to offer (and sell) their services outside Germany as well. Frequently, there are target providers who sell technical products and who, along with these products, also provide continuing education to help customers use and repair them. The iMove project can illustrate the increase of initial vocational and continuing edu-

cation, which is 'exported' from Germany to other countries. The trend reports name China and India as the places with the highest demand for German education exports (BIBB, 2016). Developing continuing education opportunities for an 'international market' may become a career field for graduates in adult and continuing education.

The internationalisation of higher education in Europe

Concurrent with these internationalisation developments in adult education, there has also been international development in higher education, where adult education is found as a field of study. As a result, adult education as a field of study is part of international developments at universities that affect all academic subjects.

In Europe, the ERASMUS programme has provided mobility opportunities for university students for 30 years, and for several years also for teachers and staff of European higher education institutions (DAAD, 2017). As the mobility budget is raised every year, European mobility becomes an instrument to support many students. Student mobility has created a so-called 'generation ERASMUS' of mobile university graduates with international experiences. Besides the mobility programmes for staff and teachers, development programmes support the institutional development of educational activities. Within all these activities, joint developments became a respected but also broad activity of European universities. Today, joint international activities are less unique but more acknowledged and requested than a decade ago.

The international policies in education outlined above have brought intensive development to European higher education institutions. Bologna-compliant study programmes were developed in the last fifteen years. In a broad way, a three-cycle degree structure (bachelor, master, doctorate) is now in place throughout Europe (European Commission, EACEA, & Eurydice, 2015). Modular structures, credit points, the recognition of internationally acquired credits, and learning agreements are just some examples of this process. Beside the legitimate criticism of the structure and the reforms, the Bologna Process developed a system that makes mobility, joint activities, and the mutual recognition of credits formally possible as an integrated part of university studies. The development of a joint module can build on these structures, which ensures the formal and legal basis for the joint activity.

In this context, universities' explicit and implicit internationalisation strategies may support international activities. These strategies can include raising international student enrolment, facilitating the recognition of internationally

acquired credits, supporting international summer or winter schools, increasing the number of courses held in English, or providing additional funding for long-/short-term mobility. Support may not mainly be financial. But a university's commitment makes administrative and committee work easier, especially in terms of administrative and legal structures for international work. When it comes to the development of international programmes, a university's digital, technical, and media services may substantially support the development of digital and online support for international collaboration activities in teaching and research.

The educational objectives of the Joint Module COMPALL

The *Joint Module COMPALL* is developed in response to the growing need for international insights among graduates in adult and continuing education on the one hand and a growing commitment of universities to international teaching activities on the other hand. It understands international insights as a need for international experiences that can neither be limited to academic subjects nor to selected competences. Rather, holistic and – as far as possible – broad-based experience in thinking, acting, and reflecting within an international learning environment is necessary to receive these insights. The goal is to cultivate

[...] a process of understanding international and intercultural phenomena. Comparisons in international groups provide new insights into other countries and into new aspects and variations of new models. They also facilitate a better and more detailed understanding of the situation in one's own home country. Furthermore, they give participants a sense of how difficult it is to compare situations in other countries, [...] to understand in a cognitive, emotional, and social way the limitations of our understanding of our own and other phenomena. Ideally, this insight leads to an attitude of further questioning one's own understanding in an ongoing endeavour to working on deeper understanding. An ideal 'result' of the Winter School is to never have a final result, but to continue the never-ending journey of personal efforts to try to understand each other. This also means searching for the things that link us to each other: to be aware of the always existing boundaries of our own understanding while developing an attitude of 'constantly trying'. (Egetenmeyer, 2016, p. 19)

Against this background, the following educational objectives should be understood as interdependent rather than isolated objectives.

The academic objective of the *Joint Module COMPALL* is to analyse European policies in lifelong learning that refer to adult education and the relevant policies of other international organisations. The analysis includes an insight into the diversity of forms in which international policies may appear and be implemented. It should make participants aware of the fact that European educational policies

must be adapted to diverse local situations, and that there are diverse forms of appearance inside and outside the European Union. The second academic objective is to provide participants with in-depth insights into one current research issue in adult and continuing education and its international forms of appearance. These issues change each year according to the current research questions of international experts teaching in the *Joint Module COMPALL*. This approach allows participants to study and research current trends and to gain an insight into cutting-edge research questions in adult and continuing education.

The research methodology objective is to cultivate participants' skills for analysing relationships between theories, policies/politics, and empirical practice in adult and continuing education. As there seem to be wide gaps between these fields, participants learn how to use a theoretical model to analyse policies/politics as well as empirical practice. In this way, they practice making analytical use of educational theories in general. Participants will be equipped with analytical skills to analyse practical contexts of their future employment contexts, too. Furthermore, participants apply comparative research skills in adult education in a research-based learning context. In this way, they are introduced to the comparative-interpretative research method of the *Joint Module COMPALL* and are guided to use it. Doctoral students are introduced to writing a joint comparative research paper. Furthermore, they are guided in the writing process and the quality assurance process (e.g. adaption to peer review, proofreading, publication).

Beside the academic and methodological objectives, the development of **intercultural competences** plays a crucial role in the *Joint Module COMPALL*. One aspect of this objective is to develop the ability to use English as a language for international communication in adult education. This includes knowing specialised and professional English terminology, but it also means being willing and prepared to interact with colleagues in English – colleagues for whom English is not the native language either. Interacting in English means disclosing one's own limitations in communicating in a foreign language. But it also cultivates an interest in each other and helps getting to know oneself and other fellows in a new mutually respectful way. The aforementioned cultivation of an 'attitude of further questioning one's own understanding in an ongoing endeavour to working on deeper understanding' (ibid.) also needs a cultivation of distance to each other – respect for the 'normality of the other' (Hunfeld, 2004, translation by the author). The cultivation of distance allows for continuously asking what can be understood from the other and one's own and where further efforts at mutual understanding are necessary. Distance supports respect for the other, willingness to learn from each other, and a working climate of awareness about the differences.

This is essential for intercultural competence and shows why the cultivation of asking and re-asking is necessary for international work.

A further educational objective is the implicit development of *didactical insights* into the development of educational settings for adults. The *Joint Module COMPALL* is developed through intensive didactical reflections between the partner universities and serves as a kind of didactical model for education with adults. Participants gain insights into online learning settings, interactive learning settings, theory-practice learning settings, and programme design learning settings. The goal is to respect the diversity of learning settings of partner universities and participants.

Networking experiences are a further educational objective of the *Joint Module COMPALL* and stress the need for the development of international networks and partnerships. Participants are systematically brought into contact with each other during the whole joint module. In this way, a basis for the further internationalisation of practice and research in adult education is developed. Doctoral students have the possibility to write a paper in an international joint authorship, which is still a rare phenomenon in adult education (Fejes & Nylander, 2014; Käpplinger, 2015).

On the structure of the Joint Module COMPALL

Partnership and target group

The *Joint Module COMPALL* is developed as a partnership of seven universities from five different European countries with different emphases and expertise in the academic field of adult and continuing education. The joint module approach allows universities to also provide their students with academic opportunities based on the expertise of the partner universities. This is especially valuable for those partner universities that have only very limited teaching capacity in adult and continuing education. Furthermore, all partner universities can build on a context that appreciates the collaborative international development and provision of studies in adult and continuing education. Partner universities have integrated the joint module in different ways into their master's and doctoral programmes related to adult and continuing education (cf. Guimarães, Concetta, & Fridson, in this volume).

The *Joint Module COMPALL* is targeted at master's and doctoral students pursuing an academic emphasis in adult and continuing education. The *Joint Module COMPALL* consists of three parts: a preparatory part, the Winter School in Würzburg, and a follow-up part. As students have different backgrounds in

terms of their undergraduate fields of study but also in terms of their academic and research experiences (cf. Guimarães, Concetta, & Fridson, in this volume), *COMPALL* provides intensive possibilities but also requires rigorous preparation. This preparation part of the *Joint Module COMPALL* ensures that participants of the Winter School have a knowledge base that allows them take full advantage of the in-depth study and international experience during the two-week on-campus phase in Würzburg.

The preparation phase

For the preparation phase, the Strategic Partnership *COMPALL* has developed several online tutorials, which on the one hand introduce participants to the structure of the *Joint Module COMPALL* and on the other hand guide them in a didactical way through the preparatory material, which consists of preparatory readings. To that end, a Moodle course has been developed, which allows participants to interact with each other and with lecturers. Furthermore, a participant booklet outlining the structure has been designed. In addition, all online tutorials are available as open educational resources via the project website³.

The second part of participants' preparation work is developing a transnational essay relating to one of the comparative groups in which participants practice comparative research during the Würzburg Winter School. Each comparative group is guided by an international expert in the respective topic. Experienced doctoral students act as co-moderators supporting the international experts in preparing group participants. Each participant is assigned to one comparative group, which consists of about two students from each country. If possible, comparative groups represent between three and five different countries. During the preparation part, the Moodle course is used for communication between comparative group participants and moderators to agree on the topic of the transnational essay and its structure. The Strategic Partnership *COMPALL* provides participants with a guide for preparing the transnational essay. On top of that, partner universities offer on-campus meetings or seminars with students to prepare for the Winter School together.

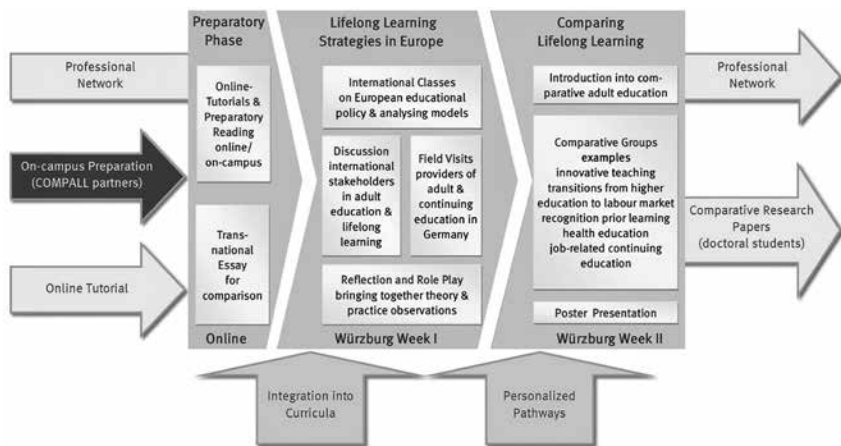
This preparation phase takes place from November until January each year. The concurrent online and on-campus preparation as well as the guides allow for developing a preparatory phase adapted to the different needs of participants. It also allows for a differentiation between participants who have studied adult education

3 Cf *COMPALL* homepage: <https://www.hw.uni-wuerzburg.de/compall/startseite/>, retrieved 19.09.2017.

in a broad way and newcomers in adult education, between master’s and doctoral students, and between internationally experienced and non-experienced participants. Coordinators at the local partner universities can decide according to the needs of their participants. Although such a level of heterogeneity among students has nowadays become uncommon in academic contexts, the experiences within the *Joint Module COMPALL* have been very positive. Differences in knowledge levels can be addressed mainly during the preparatory phase. Heterogeneity also provides a diverse reflection basis for intercultural communication, and it is used systematically for creating additional learning settings between participants. In a didactical way, it represents the diversity of participants typically encountered in adult and continuing education.

To enable participants of the *Joint Module COMPALL* to communicate with each other, they are invited to join an open and a closed LinkedIn network⁴. Via the participant profiles in LinkedIn, the network also serves as a long-term networking tool between participants. Furthermore, the COMPALL information tool provides participants with additional preparatory material in the field of comparative adult education.

Figure 1: Structure of the COMPALL Project



Source: COMPALL project

4 Cf COMPALL subpage: https://www.hw.uni-wuerzburg.de/compall/information_tool/, retrieved 19.09.2017.

The two Würzburg weeks

During the first week in Würzburg, participants study a theoretical model that can be used for analysing educational policies. They explore European policies in adult education and the structure of adult and continuing education providers in Germany. Besides being introduced to the model, students practice applying the model to international policies and using it during their discussions with adult education stakeholders and during their field visits to adult and continuing education providers. For that purpose, participants collaborate in international groups, giving each other insights into each other's contexts. Participants serve as information resources for their own countries of origin. To strengthen the exchange between participants from different universities and countries, participants are placed in the seminar rooms next to participants from other universities. This approach reinforces participants' international experience, because communication can happen in this way in informal settings as well. By the end of the week, participants reflect on their observations and, against the background of the theoretical model, develop an understanding of the interdependencies between theories, policies, and practice.

During the second week in Würzburg, the comparative groups are introduced to comparative research in adult and continuing education. Each participant acts as a representative of his/her country of origin, and the comparative groups work to identify comparative categories that work for their case. Comparative groups look at the different cases (e.g. countries or other contexts) in juxtaposition and try to come up with an interpretation by contextualising the differences between the compared cases. The second week ends with an open-space presentation, in which each group presents their comparison to all other groups.

Follow-up part

Doctoral students are offered the exclusive possibility to co-author a comparative paper together with other doctoral students in their comparative group and possibly also with the group moderator. To that end, the authors select a few categories and cases for their comparison. The doctoral students receive guidance from the moderators with structuring the paper and with the writing process. Papers are subject to peer review, and successful papers are published joint volumes at international publishers (Egetenmeyer, 2016a; Egetenmeyer, Schmidt-Lauff, & Boffo, 2017; Egetenmeyer & Fedeli, forthcoming).

Lessons learned: Outlook for developing other joint modules

The experiences in the development the *Joint Module COMPALL* show that ***institutional support*** is essential for developing a joint module and integrating it into existing degree structures. Written and unwritten strategies facilitate administrative but also financial support. This does not mean that smooth administrative ways for implementing the joint module into local curricula are already in place. Moreover, experience suggests that long-term planning and a flexible adaption to the situations at the different universities may be most successful for integrating the project into local curricula (cf. Guimarães, Concetta, & Fridson in this volume). But getting there requires a strong commitment to internationalisation by the universities.

Joint modules enable universities with ***limited teaching capacity in some subjects*** to broaden their course offerings. Therefore, it is essential to involve partners with varying degrees of expertise that can be connected to each other. Developing a module together allows for a broad adaption to the different needs and an in-depth ***reflection of subject-specific didactics in higher education***. With this approach, the joint module can contribute to an overall increase in subject-specific teaching quality at all partner universities.

The design of the joint module ***supports an insight into the diversity of research in adult education*** in other universities and countries. The joint module thereby supports joint and internationally adaptable research and the development of a joint international terminology in a field characterised by wide-ranging diversity and different forms of local institutionalisation. In fact, the comparative groups challenge their own research perspective by looking at the others' perspectives. By this approach, moderators benefit from comparative group work as well regarding their research perspective. Another aim of supporting doctoral students in international comparative adult education research is to strengthen that research field overall.

A joint module has the potential of acting as ***catalyst for further internationalisation activities*** at the partner universities. At some partner universities, we can observe an overall increase of seasonal schools offered during the project period. In the COMPALL project, we observe not only an overall increase in international exchange students attracted by the joint module but also an increase in visiting professors at the partner universities and in the number of courses taught in English. Currently, even the possibilities of a double-degree master's programme and dual doctoral programmes between some universities are being discussed.

The *Joint Module COMPALL* requires ***rigorous preparation from all participants*** (completion of six online tutorials with readings; preparation of a transna-

tional essay). We observe that all participants fulfil the preparatory requirements before meeting during the Winter School. Most importantly, we observe that it is highly advisable to support master's students in particular with their preparations in regular meetings at their home campus. In this context, the COMPALL project experienced that providing guidance material for the partner universities is very helpful, as it will enable new partners or invited teachers to gain a detailed understanding of the joint module methodology as well.

Regarding the **job placement of graduates, the partners observe a high need for international competences**, which students acquire during the *Joint Module COMPALL* (cf. Schmidt-Lauff, Semrau, & Egetenmeyer, forthcoming). This need is especially evident in explicitly internationally oriented fields in adult and continuing education. But it is also evident in the mobility of graduates, who sometimes move to one of the partner countries for employment or further studies (e.g. doctoral studies).

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