

INVESTIGATING EUROPEANNESS IN TEACHER EDUCATION (INVEST-ED)

4EU+ DOCTORAL PROJECT PROPOSAL

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BACKGROUND

This doctoral project proposal follows from ENTENTE 21 (Education for The European Teacher of the 21st Century), a 4EU+-funded educational project (2021-...) which aims at considering the notion of "Europeanness" in the field of education by addressing the following question: what does training to become a 21st century European teacher mean?

As it entails having the ability to understand the Other's cultural practices and their values, becoming such a teacher requires the development of specific competences, namely intercultural, multilingual and pedagogical competences. The ENTENTE 21 project consortium (Sorbonne University, Heidelberg University, University of Milan and University of Warsaw) addressed the need for these competences to be developed by internationalising Primary and Secondary Teacher Education programmes within the 4EU+ Alliance through the provision of tailor-made mobility programmes. As a result, a combination of (1) blended mobilities (including an online module to prepare for and reflect upon a physical school placement mobility period) and (2) virtual mobilities (a project-based online virtual exchange module) were collaboratively designed and offered to both BA and MA students from the 4EU+ partner institutions between September 2021 and September 2025.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The main educational outcome of ENTENTE 21 was to contribute to the making of a conscious European teacher who is

1. aware of education systems, educational institutions and innovative pedagogies from other European countries,
2. able to communicate in several languages and to promote multilingualism and plurilingualism in the classroom,
3. a reflective and innovative European practitioner.

The objective of the INVEST-ED doctoral project is therefore to go beyond mere success indicators (self-reports and questionnaires, typically) and to scientifically investigate the impact of the ENTENTE 21 modules on the development of the European dimension of student teachers' professional competences. Previous research has pointed to the positive impact of teaching experiences abroad on student teachers' personal and professional development (Calhoon et al., 2003; Mahon & Cushner, 2007; Stachowski, 2007). As such experiences enable them to come into contact with different educational policies and to discover other teaching practices, student teachers tend to "gain a significant amount of self-knowledge, develop personal confidence, professional competence, and a greater understanding of both global and domestic diversity" (Mahon, 2010, p. 9). In addition to a better appreciation and consideration of cultural diversity in the classroom (Kambutu & Nganga, 2008 ; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008, Lee 2011), teachers in training show greater empathy for pupils from immigrant backgrounds (Willard-Holt, 2001 ; Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Marx & Pray, 2011; Sharma, Phillion & Malewski, 2011) and are thus better equipped to

work with young people from culturally diverse backgrounds (Rapoport, 2008; Santamaría, Santamaría & Fletcher, 2009). Previous research also focuses on the positive impact of school placements abroad on the development of language skills and intercultural skills (Helmchen & Melo-Pfeifer, 2018). When it comes to Virtual Exchange in Teacher Education programmes, previously published research is more scant but nonetheless points to gains in cultural knowledge and foreign language proficiency (O’Dowd, 2021), intercultural and digital competences (Hauck, 2019) as well as in pedagogical competences (Sadler & Dooly, 2016).

The objective of the INVEST-ED project is therefore to add to this knowledge base through a longitudinal empirical study whose main research question is to know to what extent blended and virtual mobilities can be considered as impactful options for leveraging student teachers’ professional development from a European perspective. From a contrastive perspective, it will be interesting to investigate the differential effects of both mobility types – the blended mobility (which includes an actual physical school placement abroad) and the virtual mobility (which is based on the telecollaboration of international teams of student teachers) – on the development of Europeanness-oriented professional competences. In doing so, revisions of the contents of the modules designed by the ENTENTE 21 consortium will also be possible, as well as the design of alternative modules focusing on Europeanness in the professional development of student teachers, i.e. the development of student teachers’ intercultural competence, multilingual competence and pedagogical repertoires. All three competence sets contribute to defining what forms “Europeanness” can take in the everyday professional activities of a teacher. The INVEST-ED project should therefore contribute to furthering our “understanding and communication of European commonalities and diversities,” as stated in the 4EU+ Flagship 2 description, in the field of Teacher Education, and therefore aligns perfectly with Flagship 2 objectives. The project also aims at extending the strategic collaboration between Sorbonne University and the University of Milan in the field of Teacher Education which has been ongoing since the ENTENTE 21 educational project: both co-supervisors were indeed involved in ENTENTE 21 (Cédric Sarré as PI and Elena Landone as project partner) and have been in regular contact since then.

RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The INVEST-ED project will be based on rich datasets collected before (2021-2025) and during (2025 onwards) the doctoral research project. These include observation reports (blended mobilities), reflective essays (blended and virtual mobilities), collaborative lesson plans (virtual mobilities) and video recordings of student teachers’ interactions (virtual mobilities). The data will be analysed with a view to uncovering potential gains in student teachers’ intercultural competence, multilingual competence and pedagogical repertoires.

In addition to these, the doctoral project will adopt a longitudinal approach by following up on former student teachers who took part in the ENTENTE 21 modules and who are now fully qualified practicing teachers at years n+1 to n+5 (depending on when they followed said modules) in order to collect new data including (1) semi-structured interviews and (2) class observations. These new datasets will make it possible to ensure better data triangulation and to probe into the lasting impact of these Europeanness-oriented teacher education modules. The data collected will be analysed from a mixed-method perspective, that is to say both quantitatively and qualitatively. Such data collection and analysis will contribute to showing to what extent participation in the ENTENTE 21 modules has been instrumental in raising student teachers’ awareness of the added value of Europeanness-oriented Teacher Education and in helping them become **INVESTED** ambassadors of Europeanness themselves.