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Multicultural Study Groups: Long-Term Gains for Peer Facilitators

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Despite the abundance of the literature reflecting peer facilitators' short-term gains, the long-term merits of once acting as a peer facilitator still represent a blank space in the academic literature. This retrospective qualitative case study employs Personal Meaning Maps and semi-structured interviews to explore five former peer facilitators' narratives to elicit any long-term perceived value of once acting as a peer facilitator in a peer-led multicultural self-study group. Utilizing the content dimension of learning framework, the study concludes that the former peer facilitators perceive a wide range of long-term benefits such as the consolidation of knowledge, the development of skills and competencies, and a positive impact on their personal growth and professional identity.

Keywords: peer facilitation, multicultural self-study groups, international higher education, long-term gains, higher education

INTRODUCTION

Students benefit profoundly from engaging in the problem-solving group work (Fuad et al., 2019; Ferdous & Karim, 2019) and 'wearing' a hat of a peer facilitator (Bran-Barrett & Rolls, 2004) in a variety of contexts (Chen et al., 2019). Being a peer facilitator positively correlates with developing facilitators' content knowledge, professionalism, academic skills (Cusimano et al., 2018) and competences through independent work (Tsvetkova et al., 2021). Despite the abundance of the literature reflecting peer facilitators' short-term gains, the long-term merits of once acting as a peer facilitator still represent a blank space in the academic literature (Bonner & Thomas, 2017). Therefore, the study aims to analyse the long-term gains of peer facilitators. To do so, this qualitative case study explores the narratives of five former peer facilitators within an International Master's Programme in order to gain an understanding of the long-term

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perceived value of the peer facilitation experience in the context of multiculturalism. Filling in this research gap bears practical implications for various stakeholders since it provides valuable knowledge for those involved in assuring the quality of education on different levels. For instance, it might inspire educators to adapt peer facilitation as a pedagogical approach in face-to-face and virtual learning environments.

Peer Facilitators' Gains and Benefits

Adriansen and Madsen (2013) refer to the peer facilitators as students from the same study course in charge of the flow of the discussion process within a self-study group of peers.

Abundant literature reflects a broad spectrum of short-term gains emanating from taking on a peer facilitator's role. As for the cognitive gains, facilitators report such benefits as consolidating knowledge in the discipline, enhancing conceptual understanding, developing problem-solving skills and strengthening networking (Carey et al., 2018). Additionally, Chen et al. (2019) report that being a peer facilitator results in restructuring the learning material and its content which helps peer facilitators adopt a more conscious and deeper approach to learning through the cognitive presence. Arendale (2014) emphasizes that peer facilitation makes a positive impact on students' academic growth, development of higher-order critical thinking skills, self-perception as leaders and fostering professional identity. Recent studies point out that peer learning aids the development of students' co-working skills and their linguistic competence (García-Carrión et al., 2020).

Regarding the personal growth, Strassle and Engler (2020) emphasize that dialogic peer learning is positively related to establishing trustworthy relationships among peers and aids in fighting social stigma. What's more, being a peer facilitator increases students' confidence and enjoyment during the learning process and results in positive relationships with the participating students by stimulating the sense of community and helping others grow and learn (Trang & Anh, 2022).

Overall, although the immediate benefits of learning collaboratively are illustrious, the long-term effects of the peer facilitator's experience represent a blank space in the academic literature (Bonner & Thomas, 2017) with some researchers highlighting that reaching out 'to former peer facilitators 5 to 10 years after the experience may provide valuable insight as to whether or not the benefits of the experience were long-term' (Bran-Barrett & Rolls, 2004, p.95). Aiming to bridge this research gap, this study conceptualizes the former peer facilitators' long-term benefits as perceived learning outcomes viewed through the lens of the content dimension of learning developed by Knud Illeris within his three-dimensional learning theory.

Theoretical Framework: The Content Dimension of Learning

In his book *How we learn: learning and non-learning*, Illeris (2007, p.2) refers to human learning as a very complex and many-sided phenomenon and broadly defines it as 'any process that in living organisms leads to permanent capacity change and which is not solely due to biological maturation or ageing'. To understand the complexity of the

learning process, it should be addressed from the three intertwined dimensions: the content, the incentive, and the interaction. This study will approach peer facilitators' learning from its content dimension which deals with *what* we learn or *what changes* within an individual. Apart from the traditional operationalization of the learning outcomes as knowledge, skills and competences, Illeris (2007, p.73) proposes two key concepts facilitating our understanding of human learning in the contemporary world: *reflexivity* and *biographicity*, which are interlinked and reflect the 'learning in relation to the self and self-understanding'.

Following Illeris (2007), the former peer facilitators' perceived long-term learning outcomes are operationalized through the concepts of knowledge, functionality, reflexivity, and biographicity and summarized in *Table 1* outlining the analytical framework of this study.

Table 1
The analytical framework: The content dimension of learning

Themes from the theory	Operationalization from Illeris (2007)	Keywords for textual analysis	Code
Knowledge	Delimited, repetition-oriented knowledge. Understanding, meaning, insight, and awareness.	Increase in knowledge, content knowledge.	K
Functionality	Individuals' capacities to function in various contexts. Individuals' direct interests in the current situation concerning their qualifications and future perspectives. Abilities to tackle the practical challenges of life.	Application of knowledge and skills, modification of the acquired knowledge and skills. Seeing the value of learning for the future prospects; future plans, ideas, insights, any projects spun from the peer facilitation experience.	F
Reflexivity	Individuals' learning in relation to the self and self-understanding, making sense out of the constant interactions with the environment, and the insights into how the experience is shaping lives. Connected to the cultural liberation, enlightenment, liberation from all the old norms and traditions that previously controlled our lives. Involves experiential and emotional matters, self-comprehension and the formation of the identity.	Reflective mindset, reflective practice, reflective attitude, critical thinking, awakening, liberation, a transformation of the frames of reference.	R
Biographicity	Individuals' learning concerning the self and self-understanding. Includes the development of the self and the development of personality. Relates to how we perceive and interpret our lives concerning the opportunities we have and the choices we make. Includes an individual's self-comprehension and identity development. Implies developing learning to learn skills or meta-learning which includes the understanding of oneself as a learner. Developing important personal qualities such as independence, self-confidence, responsibility, ability to cooperate, flexibility, a general readiness to understand, follow and critically relate to the world around us, acquiring and fostering emotional intelligence, clarifying values and beliefs in the process of learning about ourselves, getting to know oneself, understanding one's own reactions, inclinations, preferences, strong and weak sides, etc.	Opinions, understanding, insight, meaning, attitudes, beliefs, identity, changes, transformations, values.	B

Research Question and Aims

The study aims to elicit the long-term perceived value of once acting as a peer facilitator in the peer-facilitated multicultural self-study groups. The main research question is: In the former peer facilitators' perspective, are there any long-term benefits emanating from their peer facilitation experience in the peer-facilitated multicultural self-study groups related to knowledge, functionality, reflexivity, and biographicity? If so, what are they?

METHOD

The participants are five former master students within the Erasmus Program at Aarhus University, Department of Education (DPU) in Copenhagen, Denmark (Program) who, more than five years ago, had a chance to 'try on a hat' of a peer facilitator within the peer-led and peer-facilitated multicultural self-study groups (PFSGs) proposed as a pedagogical approach within the Program. The self-study groups are referred to as multicultural owing to their composition of students of distinct nationalities, ethnicities and diverse cultural backgrounds.

The pedagogical model underpinning peer learning within PFSGs is based on the experiential learning theory which calls for students' self-directed learning driven by their interests and choices. A detailed account of this method could be found in Adriansen and Madsen (2013). To summarize, having commenced their study within the Program, the respondents were exposed to a two-hour workshop introducing them to the concept and the techniques of peer facilitation. Later, they were encouraged to team up voluntarily into self-study groups to discuss and reflect on the content of the compendiums - a collection of articles and scientific texts offered within the Program. The aim of a peer facilitator in such a group was to manage the discussion process so that to help participants connect their experience with the content under review. To do so, the peer facilitators were expected to read thoroughly the assigned parts of the compendium and devise a method for collaborative reflection on the content of the readings. The PFSGs, of which the respondents were part of, consisted of three to seven people and were held regularly at least once in two weeks for the duration of the entire academic year. Each participant had a chance to lead the discussion as a peer facilitator at least once.

The respondents were selected through purposeful sampling guided by the research objectives to ensure homogeneity in the focus experience. Since this study reaches out to the former peer facilitators after more than five years since their experience, thus a retrospective qualitative study design is applied with the data collected utilizing the Personal Meaning Maps (PMMs) and the semi-structured interviews. According to Lelliott (2009), the practice of creating a PMM is reflective and the method is acknowledged to help elicit richer learning outcomes which are valuable for a retrospective study. Following this method, before the interviews, the participants were asked to create a PMM by reflecting on any (if any) perceived long-term gains from once acting as a peer facilitator. Upon the PMMs completion, a one-hour semi-structured interview was conducted with each respondent where they narrated on the bullet points identified in their PMM. Following the semi-structured interview

guidelines (Cohen et al., 2018), and inspired by the analytical framework (*Table 1*), the follow-up questions were posed to elicit the details of participants' former experience as peer facilitators. At the initial stage of the research, the formal informed consent (BERA, 2018) was obtained and the purpose of the study was thoroughly explained to the participants.

At the stage of data analysis, the interviews were fully transcribed and the data were approached through the lens of the analytical framework employing the thematic content analysis (Cohen et al., 2018). Firstly, following the procedures of the concept-driven coding, the initial codes for knowledge (K), functionality (F), reflexivity (R), and biographicity (B) were assigned throughout the digital document and gathered in a table. Secondly, the rigorous reading of the narratives was repeated to run an inductive coding where the literature inspired emerging themes were identified and summarized in *Table 2*. At the final stage, the quotes representing each theme were chosen. In the flow of the analysis, the rigorous cross-referencing of the emerged themes was applied and the themes were peer-reviewed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings reflecting the former peer facilitators' long-term benefits are structured around the categories inspired by Illeris's (2007) content dimension of learning framework: *Knowledge*, *Functionality* and *Reflexivity*, and *Biographicity* (*Table* 2).

Table 2
The summary of themes

Illeris' lens	Emerged themes
Knowledge	Increased Content Knowledge
	Increased Knowledge of Facilitation
	Rethinking Learning
Functionality	Language and Co-working skills
	Learning Mindfulness
Reflexivity	Critical Mindset
	Relational capital
Biographicity	Becoming a better person
	Professional identity
	Interculturality

Knowledge

In this study, learning outcomes are manifested in the peer facilitators' perceived knowledge as understandings, insights, opinions, awareness, and meaning stemming from the former peer facilitation experience. Overall, three themes emerged: increased *Content Knowledge*, *Knowledge of Facilitation*, and *Rethinking Learning.*

Content Knowledge

In this study, the content knowledge is viewed as cumulative learning (Illeris, 2007) manifested in any recollection of the compendium content (compulsory articles and scientific texts) offered to the peer facilitators within the Erasmus programme. Some

respondents were still capable of recalling the content of the articles discussed within the study group sessions. One respondent was able to reference the session which he facilitated.

"I remember as a facilitator I came up with questions related to the research ethics and we focused on how to connect the reading to our practical experience, to the jobs we used to do before Erasmus" (R2).

Knowledge of Facilitation

Former peer facilitators' perceived long-term benefits were connected to gaining conceptual and procedural knowledge of facilitation, the insights about the effectiveness of facilitation as a pedagogical tool, and the awareness of the factors hampering or aiding the facilitation process. Hence, the experience contributed to the awareness of peer facilitation as an effective teaching and learning method and resulted in adopting a more conscious and deeper approach to learning, which corroborates previous studies (Chen et al., 2019).

"I have learned more about how study groups function, it inspired me, it made me think that this method is very effective because you take responsibility for your learning" (R4).

Rethinking Learning

The respondents shared that their experience within the study groups as peer facilitators and participants helped them compare and contrast the way learning is construed in the context of their countries and question its effectiveness.

"My experience of being a peer facilitator in a PFSG changed the way I perceive learning. The way I see learning now: it is social-based, relationship-based, meaning and knowledge are built through relationships" (R1).

It could be suggested that these changes might be the indicators of what Mezirow (1991) terms objective reframing, i.e. the change in thinking about a certain phenomenon: learning. Overall, the former peer facilitators report that the experience in the PFSGs, where learning was experience-driven, self-directed and reflective (Adriansen &Madsen, 2013), assisted them in conceptualizing learning as an *'active process rather than feeding information to students'* (R4), *'social process which is relationship-based since it involved both taking and giving*' (R1), as an active process which involves assimilating your personal experience to the new content under study through *'interaction and dialogue'* (R2). Consequently, it could be inferred, that the experience within the PFSGs reinforced the consolidation of knowledge and understanding in their field of study by illuminating the insights on the ontology of learning from the socio-constructive perspective as well as effective pedagogical approaches to enhance it. According to Bransen et al. (2021, p.34), viewing learning in a broader perspective and 'unravelling the levels of self-, co-, and socially shared regulation of learning' is a necessary condition for developing students' skills and competences.

Functionality and Reflexivity

In the content dimension of learning, knowledge and meaning are inseparable from what we can do with that knowledge, i.e. with our abilities, skills, and competences or, in Illeris' (2007) terms: functionality. Since reflection or afterthought, along with critical thinking could be approached as an ability, a skill, or an attitude, thus the findings related to Illeris' (2007) concepts of functionality and reflexivity are combined and split into four emerged themes: *Language and Co-working skills, Learning Mindfulness, Critical Mindset,* and *Self-Efficacy* beliefs.

Language and Co-working skills

The findings indicate that the former peer facilitator experience made a positive impact on developing such competences as question-posing skills (R5), building coherent and cohesive arguments (R1), oral and written communication in English as a foreign language (R2), as well as team-working skills in the intercultural settings (R2). Another value of the peer facilitation experience was attributed to developing an academic interest in the field of facilitation, with some respondents linking facilitation to their current academic focus.

"I have chosen to explore facilitation more deeply on the academic level" (R2).

The participants reported actively employing the above-mentioned generic competences in their current academic pursuits (R5), working with teenagers (R1), and in teacher training (R2).

"In the future, if I have a chance to work in certain settings, I would suggest facilitation as a methodology because I could see its effectiveness" (R4).

The findings corroborate the previous studies reporting the positive impact of collaborative learning on students' collective efficacy, planning and goal-setting, problem-solving and conflict-management skills (Hebles et al., 2019), as well as language competence (Yavuz & Arslan, 2018).

Learning Mindfulness

The former peer facilitators repeatedly connected their peer facilitator experience to developing a particular mindset encouraging them to see learning "*all-around"* (R1).

"The facilitation experience changed the way I see and appreciate learning. Now I can find learning moments in every relationship. If you get to see learning in all places formal and informal, so it becomes real. It is up to us to make it visible" (R1).

"I have learned to look even at conflicts as learning opportunities" (R5).

Additionally, the former facilitators emphasized the increase in their awareness of the role of reflection for their learning process. For example, the respondents made an emphasis on still utilizing silent reflection to structure their thoughts before articulating them and reported developing a 'thinking pause' exercised before replying to complex questions.

"I am not rushing in to answer, on the contrary, now I give myself time to think" (R1).

Some former peer facilitators attributed developing a 'listener's attitude' (vs. talker's) to their former experience as peer facilitators, as well as reported using the active listening skills in their current practice.

"In the study groups apart from talking, we had a chance to reflect. We would allow ourselves time for reflection: to make the connections inside and then share instead of just talking. Later, I used this technique with my own students. Because some people use talking for the sake of talking, but you facilitate to help them reflect. And then you also give the ones who are used to reflecting, a chance to talk. So, facilitation techniques help to involve everyone" (R1).

This attitude, mindset, or conscious effort to see the experience as a learning opportunity along with the reflexive attitude to that experience could be viewed as the *Learning Mindfulness* which could be linked to what Dweck (2008) conceptualizes as the 'growth mindset' reflecting a set of beliefs in your capabilities to constantly develop and improve. Having a growth mindset has been repeatedly linked to strengthening students' academic performance (Brougham & Kashubeck-West, 2017).

Critical Mindset

Another long-term benefit was related to developing critical thinking, reflection, or, as one of the respondents said: *"academic criticality"* (R5) or critical mindset. For example, the respondents highlighted that the experience had permanently changed the way they read academic literature: from reading for understanding and comprehension to reading for questioning and problematizing the text. As the data revealed, performing a role of a peer facilitator helped develop a certain 'critical reading lens' implying "thinking *reflectively and critically about what you read by thinking of questions rather than conclusions"* (R1), and approaching the readings through *"questions and doubts"* (R2) rather than "*believing easily in what you are reading about"* (R1).

"The way we were preparing ourselves for the meeting was different. We were asked to make questions instead of conclusions. It helped me be more critical and changed the way I read and absorb information. I am still using this approach" (R1).

It could be suggested that these findings are aligned with the studies reporting the growth in facilitators' cognitive presence (Chen et al.,2019), and the studies illustrating that peer facilitation results in peer facilitators' developing higher-order critical thinking skills and making a positive impact on their academic growth (Arendale, 2014).

Self-Efficacy beliefs

The former peer facilitators related developing their critical mindset to the growth in confidence in their current academic pursuits, or in what Bandura (1997) refers to as the self-efficacy beliefs - people's beliefs in their capabilities to produce desired outcomes by their performance, or actions.

"When I was doing the facilitation, which was part of those peer conversations, it developed my academic criticality. When I got a chance to share my ideas with peers, I was surprised that some people would be critical of the opinions written in the journal articles because I thought you are not supposed to question those, you just need to understand those. So when people started questioning the readings it made me realize that there is this opportunity to critically engage with some of the texts, that it is ok not to agree with them because they are not the universal truths. This realization helped me in my future career in the academic sector, but also in the development sector which is a place where it is very important to be critical. So, I think that was a very transformative experience for me which taught me that there is always space for criticality. Now, doing my Ph.D., I feel confident having this skill" (R5).

Also, the respondents pointed out that they perceived the former peer facilitation experience as an impetus to master their proficiency in the academic English language since peer-led study groups created a space to mimic, practice and assimilate the 'dominant discourse' in their field of study and engage with the complex academic vocabulary.

"I improved my English significantly when being a peer facilitator. It required paraphrasing the compendium, looking for my own words to compose questions and leading the discussions. That experience gave me a great push in my further language studies, I realized how I was, and still am a language learner" (R2).

As Bond (2019, p.650) points out, the international students' inability to eloquently express thoughts and ideas in a foreign language might often result in a decrease in students' self-confidence, since 'intellectual ability might be conflated with language proficiency' which might result in the international students' often perceiving themselves through the 'deficit' lens. Nevertheless, as this study shows, in the long run, experiencing a certain 'deficit' within a safe environment of the PFSG might lead to the occurrence of a 'disjuncture' (Jarvis, 2012), i.e. a dissonance triggering further educational endeavours and leading to mastery. These findings corroborate the studies reporting an increase in facilitators' self-esteem and self-confidence and overall enjoyment during learning (Bran-Barrett & Rolls, 2004; García-Carrión et al., 2020).

Relational capital

The findings show that the experience as the former participants and peer facilitators assisted in developing a short-term and a long-term social and relational capital, i.e. a network of friends, colleagues, critical friends, and collaborators.

"My study group helped me make friends, and I am still in touch with them. The experience helped me connect to people on a deeper level because I had a chance to know them both in professional and informal contexts, and it resulted in developing respect and trust. We keep in touch and I see one of my friends as a critical friend" (R2).

It could be suggested that the findings corroborate the studies exploring the benefits of the Erasmus mobility programs and listing the expansion of students' personal and

professional networks as one of the Erasmus experience benefits (Anabo & Elexpuru, 2017; Cairns et al., 2018).

Additionally, the impact of the peer facilitation experience expanded the personal relationships as well.

"Also, I am using what I have learned in my relationships because facilitation is very relationship-based. For instance, with my friends, especially now, considering the COVID-19 situation, people are a bit tenser, and the idea of trying to respect their opinions, the idea of tolerating healthy conflict, became relevant" (R5).

Biographicity

Analyzing the data against Illeris' (2007) concept of biographicity brought about the findings reflecting the former peer facilitators' gains thematized into *Becoming a Better Person*, an impact on *Professional Identity*, and *Interculturality*.

Becoming a Better Person

An individual's identity is viewed as continuously shaped by the multiple social environments in which an individual is engaged in. According to Illeris (2007, p.141) identity is developed in the process of social interaction through dialogical practice and reflexivity. It represents 'an incoherent, situation-determined form with the character of several different social roles which the individual assumes or slides into'. According to Illeris (2007) what glues together an individual's coherent perception and the understanding of the *self* is the narration of their life story. Hence, the process of identity reconstruction is seen as a personal narration, i.e. interpretation and meaning-making through reflection on a personal life story where one subjectively assigns significance to the events and contexts important for their life course (Illeris 2007, p.141).

Thus, if viewed as part of a life story, the former peer facilitators' narratives point that, for many, their experience in a PFSG, embedded in the broader Erasmus framework, represented an important milestone in their lives and careers, and was often termed as "*transformative"* (R1, R2, R5). For example, the respondents explicitly drew a connection between being a peer facilitator and becoming a better person. The former facilitators revealed that being part of the study group experience helped them develop a more collaborative mindset and a more positive attitude towards group work in general. Specifically, the experience in a PFSG reportedly helped to see the value of group work, prompting seeking collaboration with like-minded peers and enjoying it. Being a peer facilitator and a participant in PFSG helped the respondents become "*a more respectful person*" (R2), "*more of a listener*" (R1), "*wiser person, non-judgmental, a more open-minded individual, and more humble*" (R2).

"I remember when being a peer facilitator I first felt extremely responsible for other peoples' learning so I was a bit stressed, thinking too much of how to facilitate the learning better. With time, I realized that there was no point in being so worried since it was entirely up to my peers to learn, I couldn't control it. Once I understood that, I became more relaxed, I learnt to let go of control. And that insight is still relevant to my current practice. I think I became a more relaxed person in general. I think I was a bit

self-assured at the beginning, but I learned to be more humble and more respectful" (R2).

It could be proposed that the experience of being a peer facilitator in a PFSG embedded in the Erasmus Programme was related to the occurrence of what Mezirow (1991) terms subjective reframing, i.e. changes in the perception of the self, your identity and your values.

Professional Identity

According to Martínez-de-la-Hidalga and Villardón-Gallego (2019, p.10), the self is conceptualized as a unity of various I-positions brought together through self-dialogue and narration of personal life stories. Thus, the professional dimension of identity is an integral part of the self. This study reveals that the former facilitators perceive certain changes in relation to their professional self-identification. The respondents shared that after their peer facilitation experience they commenced referring to themselves as facilitators more often. The findings are aligned with the previous studies establishing a link between peer-facilitated learning and the development of professional identity (Burgess & Nestel, 2014).

"The word facilitation firmly became one of the regular words I use in my professional context. I have noticed that I like identifying myself as a facilitator when I am asked to present myself in an official document, or a conference" (R2).

"I like being called a facilitator because of the meaning it conveys. For me, it is associated with helping people, equality and power-free relationships. It conveys more of my personal and professional values" (R5).

Interculturality

Another significant shift pointed out by the respondents was related to their perspective on culture.

"Being a peer facilitator challenged the way I view culture. What I realized during the facilitation is that culture is a verb. Because we normally think of culture as a 'thing', something static like, for example, French culture, but you can't really attach characteristics to groups of people, it is problematic" (R5).

The findings corroborate with the studies exploring the benefits of the Erasmus mobility programs and listing the strengthening of 'interculturality' – the cultural awareness of diversity and mutual respect of differences - as one of its valuable assets (Ferreira-Lopes et al., 2021). Cairns et al. (2018, p.4) argue that the Erasmus programs are conducive to creating the international learning habitus in which 'a spatially reflexive form of learning can emerge' resulting in Erasmus students' better prospects of employment, increased cultural awareness, and positive international conviviality. Moreover, not only did the experience result in learning about other cultures, but in deepening the understanding of the facilitators' own culture, and the awareness of the cultural impact on identity.

"In my study group, there were five of us, all from different countries and cultures. It was amazing to be part of that community since it helps realize how different aspects of your own culture are embedded in you, how you are the product of your own culture, how your thinking is shaped by the culture you grew up in. Comparing and contrasting your experience in multicultural settings makes you reflect on your own culture and see what you appreciate in your culture or a different culture, so you reflect on what you would like to borrow or change in your culture" (R2).

Illeris (2007, p.69) states that reflexivity is connected to cultural liberation, i.e. it is through reflexivity, i.e. critical or reflective thinking do we become enlightened and, as a result, liberated from 'all the old norms and traditions that previously controlled our lives'. Therefore, it could be concluded that employing the peer-facilitated self-study groups could be deemed an effective pedagogical approach within the International Erasmus Programs conducive for creating reflexive learning ecosystems triggering the development of students' interculturality, increased awareness of cultural biases, and as a result, cultural liberation.

CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The study reached out to five former peer facilitators and students within the Erasmus Master's Program hosted at Aarhus University, Department of Education, Copenhagen, Denmark. Employing Illeris's content dimension of learning framework, this small scale case study concludes that the former peer facilitators perceive a wide range of long-term benefits stemming from their former experience in the context of multicultural self-study groups in the dimensions of *Knowledge*, *Functionality*, *Reflexivity*, and *Biographicity*. By providing examples of the peer facilitators' cumulative, assimilative, accommodative, and transformative learning outcomes, this study suggests that employing peer facilitation in multicultural self-study groups yields not only short-term but also long-term cognitive, instrumental, personal, and social gains for alumni. Hence, peer facilitation, underpinned by the experiential learning theory and predicated on students' self-directedness, dialogue and reflection, could be considered a highly effective strategy in the context of internationalization of higher education curriculum to address the current shift of the higher education institutions to the student-centred learning and competence development. Nevertheless, a variety of factors must be taken into account to ensure the effectiveness of students' independent work within the peer-facilitated study groups, for example, students' personal factors including students' motivation to work independently.

Although this study aimed to focus the interviews with the former peer facilitators solely around their peer facilitation experience within the PFSG, at times it was hard to respect that boundary since the facilitators related to their peer facilitation practice as nestled within the broader Erasmus experience. Consecutively, this study has faced a challenge encountered in other studies when 'the developmental benefits facilitators perceive cannot be described in isolation, but rather work together to compose an overall sense of growth among the facilitators' (Micari et al., 2006, p.28). Accordingly, the study acknowledges that many other factors were involved in the former facilitators' learning process, including individual cognitive, social and affective differences, individual prior

learning experiences and differences in respondents' socio-cultural backgrounds. Also, the study is limited by the sample size, which rules out the possibility of generalization. Thus, further large-scale studies could contribute to a more profound understanding of the long-term gains for former peer facilitators. What's more, it would be interesting to explore the relationship between the acquired outcomes in the content dimension of learning and the former peer facilitators' employability.

Regarding the value of the study, firstly, it adds to the few academic publications exploring the perceived long-term gains of once 'wearing' a hat of a peer facilitator. Secondly, the findings contribute to the studies exploring the benefits of the Erasmus mobility programs by bringing into focus the role of the pedagogical approaches for the overall programme success. Finally, we hope that this publication will draw the attention of educators to employing peer facilitation to support students' learning.

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