



Outgoing Faculty Mobility and Internationalisation in Medical Education: Perceptions of an Ecuador-Bolivia Cooperation Experience

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Outgoing faculty mobility is a relevant strategy for internationalising higher education, particularly in health sciences programmes, where academic exchange enables the comparison of educational practices and strengthens interinstitutional networks. **Objective:** To analyse the perception of a Medicine lecturer from Universidad San Gregorio de Portoviejo regarding an outgoing academic mobility experience at Universidad Privada Domingo Savio, Bolivia, and assess its contribution to institutional internationalisation. **Methods:** A qualitative, exploratory-descriptive case study was conducted. Data came from a semi-structured interview organised around five areas and a documentary review of the activity schedule. Reflexive thematic coding was applied. **Results:** Five categories emerged: academic and intercultural motivation; institutional management of mobility; integration into the host context; bidirectional transfer of academic practices; and development of research networks. Activities included lectures, theoretical-practical classes, research workshops, advice on clinical simulation and OSCEs, meetings, cultural activities and collaborative project planning. Programme support, host-university receptiveness and academic reciprocity were strengths. Central administrative procedures required improvement to avoid duplicated documentation and logistical errors. **Conclusions:** The experience fostered curriculum internationalisation, exchange of good practices and interinstitutional projects, linking academic cooperation, global health and intercultural medical education through planned, assessable and sustainable management

INTRODUCTION

The internationalisation of higher education is no longer understood as an isolated set of external activities, but as a cross-cutting academic policy aimed at integrating international, intercultural and global dimensions into teaching, research, community engagement and university management. Within this approach, academic mobility is one of its most visible components, although its actual value depends on the institution's capacity to transform individual experience into organisational learning, curricular innovation and sustainable cooperation networks (de Wit & Altbach, 2021; Jones et al., 2021). In Latin America, internationalisation faces particular challenges related to financial constraints, administrative barriers, inequalities in access, visa restrictions, technological gaps and weaknesses in institutional planning. In Ecuador, recent studies emphasise that university internationalisation requires greater systematisation, alignment with quality policies and stronger cooperation mechanisms that go beyond the logic of isolated actions (Pinos Montenegro & Zurita Altamirano, 2024).

In health sciences programmes, internationalisation acquires further relevance. Contemporary medical education requires an understanding of diverse health realities, contextualised clinical protocols, social determinants of health, intercultural competencies and collaborative work in networks. Recent literature in medical education has indicated that international experiences – physical, virtual or hybrid – can contribute to training professionals with global awareness, provided that they are designed ethically, reciprocally and with academic relevance (Wu et al., 2022; Wijnen-Meijer, 2023). Outgoing faculty mobility can be regarded as a high-value strategy because it affects not only the person who travels, but also the students, colleagues, research teams and management structures involved. Visiting lecturers act as mediators between academic cultures, transfer good practices, compare methodologies, activate networks and may generate new opportunities for cooperation. However, its effectiveness depends on institutional support, clear objectives, reciprocity with the host university and an evaluation system that makes it possible to identify achievements, difficulties and future developments (Li, 2021; Shen et al., 2022).

The objective of this study was to analyse the perception of a lecturer from the USGP Medicine Programme regarding an outgoing academic mobility experience undertaken at UPDS, Bolivia, identifying her motivations, management conditions, activities carried out, academic contributions, research prospects and recommendations for strengthening institutional internationalisation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The experience analysed in this article forms part of an earlier cooperation process between Universidad San Gregorio de Portoviejo (USGP), Ecuador, and Universidad Privada Domingo Savio (UPDS), Bolivia. This process included curriculum internationalisation activities such as mirror classes, incoming faculty mobility and joint research initiatives. The published precedent concerning a mirror class between the two institutions documented the usefulness of technology-mediated strategies in fostering academic exchange and curriculum internationalisation in medical education (Ávila et al., 2024). On this basis, outgoing faculty mobility represents a complementary phase that deepens the interinstitutional relationship and enables a transition from virtual cooperation to in-person cooperation.

METHODOLOGY

Approach and design: a qualitative, exploratory-descriptive study with a case study design was conducted. This approach was appropriate because it enabled an in-depth understanding of the participating lecturer's subjective experience while also organising the information into categories related to the institutional management of mobility, academic exchange and the future development of international cooperation.

Study context: the mobility took place within the framework of cooperation between the Medicine programmes at USGP and UPDS. The participating lecturer belongs to the Pharmacology area of the USGP Medicine Programme and carried out academic, research, institutional and cultural activities in the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia. The documentary schedule reviewed records activities between 31 March and 11 April 2025, preceded and followed by travel arrangements and interinstitutional coordination.

Participant and primary source of information: the unit of analysis was the experience of one lecturer participating in outgoing mobility. The main information was obtained through a semi-structured interview organised into five sections: motivations and expectations; mobility management; academic and cultural experience; impact and future development; and internationalisation as an institutional strategy. The interview gathered perceptions of expectations, support received, logistical difficulties, integration into the host university, teaching-related learning, network development and recommendations for future processes.

Documentary review: in addition to the interview, the schedule of activities for the stay was reviewed, which made it possible to triangulate the information reported by the participant with specific teaching and research activities, institutional meetings, cultural activities and the conclusion of the mobility. For the analysis, minor date inconsistencies in the original table for the second week were resolved, while maintaining the logical sequence of activities between 7 and 11 April 2025.

Analysis technique: reflexive thematic coding was applied, understood as a flexible procedure for identifying patterns of meaning in qualitative data. The process included a complete reading of the interview, identification of meaning units, grouping of initial codes, construction of categories, review of internal coherence and interpretative reporting of findings. The methodological approach was based on current criteria of coherence and reflexivity for thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Rigour criteria: credibility was sought through triangulation between the interview and the documentary schedule; dependability through a clear description of the analysis procedure; confirmability through the use of brief textual evidence; and transferability through contextualisation of the experience, its institutional actors and the conditions under which it took place. The interpretation remained focused on the participant's perception, without generalising the results to the entire faculty community.

Ethical considerations: the interview was used for academic purposes and to systematise an institutional experience. For the final version intended for publication, we used the code 'Participating lecturer 1' and omitted non-essential personal identifiers.

RESULTS

The outgoing mobility analysed took the form of an intensive academic experience involving teaching, research, methodological exchange, cultural engagement and project management activities. Five interpretative categories emerged from the interview and documentary review: academic and intercultural motivation, institutional management of mobility, integration into the host context, bidirectional transfer of academic practices and development of research networks.

Table 1. Matrix of Analytical Categories Derived From the Interview

Area of analysis	Initial codes	Interpretative finding	Brief evidence
Motivations and expectations	Professional development; faculty exchange; academic culture	Mobility was perceived as an opportunity to broaden teaching horizons, strengthen existing relationships and consolidate cooperation in Pharmacology and research.	'share experiences' / 'learn about new cultures'
Mobility management	Programme coordination; institutional support; logistics; documentation	The programme and international counterpart facilitated the experience; the central administrative level showed areas for improvement owing to duplicated documentation	'delegation ... impeccable' / 'send the same documentation'

		and errors concerning the destination or identification.	
Academic and cultural experience	Teaching; workshops; clinical simulation; OSCE; integration	The lecturer integrated favourably into the host context and participated in classes, lectures, advisory sessions and cultural activities.	'integration flowed naturally'
Teaching and institutional impact	Bidirectional learning; protocols; global health; good practices	The mobility generated benefits for the visiting lecturer and the host university, particularly in the discussion of protocols, clinical simulation and practical assessment.	'beneficial, bidirectional'
Future cooperation	Joint research; student research groups; public health research lines	The stay made it possible to agree on potential comparative projects between Bolivia and Ecuador on diabetes, HPV, breast cancer and cardiometabolic risk.	'projects ... jointly'

Source: Prepared by the Authors on THE Basis of the Results of the Interview Conducted

Academic and Intercultural Motivation

The participant described high expectations before the trip, linked to her wish to share university teaching experiences in the health field and her personal interest in learning about other cultures. This motivation did not arise in isolation, but as a continuation of a previous academic relationship between the two institutions. The earlier mirror class and the incoming mobility of a lecturer from the Bolivian university served as precedents that fostered trust, communication and the planning of new challenges. The mobility was directly related to her academic roles: teaching Pharmacology and serving as a research delegate. This dual role meant that the stay was not limited to teaching classes, but included meetings with the research area, work with student research groups and the definition of collaborative lines of research.

Institutional Management of Mobility

Planning began months before the stay and involved the programme's internationalisation delegation, the Medicine programme coordination, the Bolivian counterpart, the institutional internationalisation department, the Rectorate and authorities of the host university. This sequence shows that outgoing faculty mobility requires coordination at multiple levels: academic, administrative, financial and relational. USGP supported the mobility by purchasing air tickets, providing an institutional kit and supplying materials for protocol gifts. UPDS, for its part, provided support from the time of arrival, airport transfer, accommodation in a university residence, a food allowance and cultural activities. This support was perceived as providing conditions that enabled the lecturer to focus on the academic objectives. The main area for improvement concerned central administrative procedures: the participant reported repeated submission of documents, confusion regarding personal details and initial difficulties in correctly defining the destination. Although these issues did not prevent the mobility, they indicate the need for more standardised internal protocols, checklists, designated personnel and a single document file for each mobility.

Academic and Cultural Activities During the Stay

During the first week, Pharmacology and interinstitutional research activities were carried out. The schedule included a presentation to the authorities, Pharmacology lectures on HIV and tuberculosis, theoretical-practical classes in different semesters, workshop classes, tours of health sciences facilities, meetings with the Rectorate and Vice-Rectorate, an interview with institutional communications staff, and exchanges with lecturers on teaching methodologies, clinical simulation and OSCEs. During the second week, work with student research groups was further developed. A keynote lecture on the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV was delivered, together with workshops on general aspects of health sciences research, the writing of scientific articles and research projects, as well as technical meetings to consolidate interinstitutional proposals. Cultural activities in Santa Cruz de la Sierra and Cotoca contributed to social integration and an understanding of the local context.

The integration experience was assessed very positively. The participant perceived receptiveness among students, lecturers and authorities, as well as a willingness to engage in exchange. From a pedagogical perspective, she identified differences in academic dynamics: the host university used the flipped classroom more frequently, whereas the visiting lecturer combined keynote lectures, workshops and knowledge consolidation activities. This interaction enabled discussion of the strengths of both contexts and possible improvements.

Bidirectional Transfer and Institutional Learning

One of the most relevant contributions was the bidirectional nature of the mobility. The lecturer gained professional and intercultural enrichment; at the same time, the host university received advice on clinical simulation, OSCEs and experiences from the USGP Medicine Programme. Comparison of protocols for preventing vertical transmission of HIV made it possible to discuss clinical and public health aspects from a regional perspective, recognising Andean similarities and differences in implementation. Faculty mobility should not be understood as the individual transfer of one person, but as a mechanism for transferring knowledge, practices and relationships. When planned with clear objectives, it can activate curricular improvements, inspire methodological adjustments and generate a culture of institutional learning among peers.

Development of Networks and Collaborative Projects

The mobility concluded with plans for several joint research projects addressing health problems relevant to Ecuador and Bolivia. The topics identified included social determinants in the control of type 2 diabetes, public health policies for the prevention and management of diabetes, waist-to-height ratio as a predictor of cardiometabolic risk, prevalence and risk factors of human papillomavirus, and a comparative review of breast cancer prevalence and mortality. The presence of specific thematic lines reveals an important transition: from mobility as an individual educational experience to mobility as a platform for academic production and scientific cooperation. The participation of student researchers and research groups also extends the scope of internationalisation towards early research training.

Table 2. Summary of the Academic, Research and Institutional Mobility Activities

Stage	Main activities	Actors involved	Expected outcome
Prior preparation	Coordination of dates, objectives, documents, travel and academic schedule.	Internationalisation delegation, programme coordination, institutional department, UPDS counterpart.	Approval of the mobility and validated schedule.
Week 1	Lectures and Pharmacology classes on HIV/TB; meetings with authorities; faculty exchange; work with research staff.	Visiting lecturer, Medicine students, UPDS authorities, lecturers and research staff.	Pedagogical exchange, sharing of USGP experiences and strengthening of links.

Week 2	Keynote lecture; research and scientific writing workshops; project meetings; cultural activities.	Student research groups, research personnel, authorities and visiting lecturer.	Definition of joint lines of research and intercultural learning.
Conclusion and future development	Institutional farewell, review of objectives, planning of future projects.	Health Sciences authorities, teaching and research teams.	Continuity of Ecuador-Bolivia cooperation through projects and academic activities.

Institutional cycle of outgoing faculty mobility

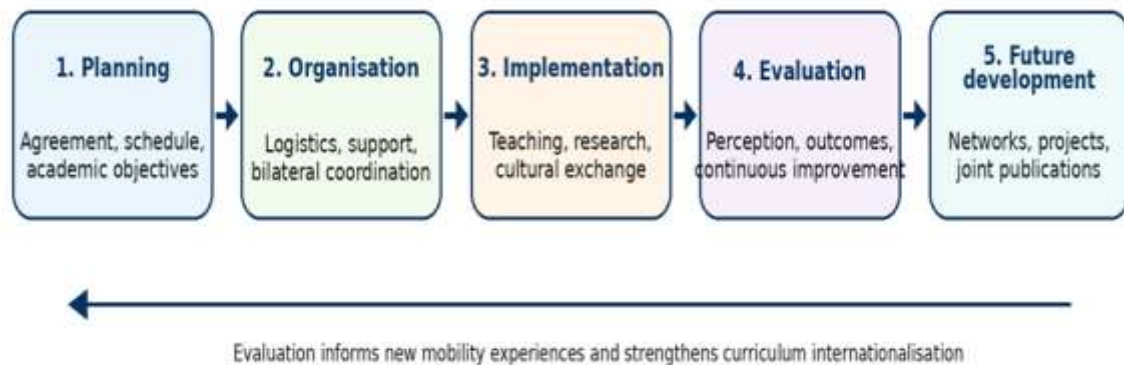


Figure 1. Synthetic Model for Systematising Outgoing Faculty Mobility
Source: Prepared by the Authors on the Basis of the Semi-Structured Interview and the Documentary Mobility Schedule

DISCUSSION

The findings show that outgoing faculty mobility can become a strategic mechanism for internationalisation when it is linked to a history of cooperation, defined academic objectives and subsequent development. In the case analysed, the mobility was not an isolated event, but the continuation of a relationship built through a mirror class, incoming mobility and joint research planning. This sequence is consistent with contemporary approaches that recommend understanding internationalisation as an integral institutional process rather than as a collection of disconnected activities (de Wit & Altbach, 2021; Jones et al., 2021).

The experience also confirms that faculty members are decisive actors in internationalisation. The literature has indicated that faculty participation depends both on personal and academic motivations and on institutional conditions that facilitate management, recognise the effort involved and generate continuity (Li, 2021). In this study, the lecturer's motivation was associated with

professional development, cultural exchange and the possibility of connecting teaching and research. Nevertheless, the perception of administrative difficulties shows that individual motivation is not sufficient: clear protocols, documentary coordination and more efficient support systems are required.

In medical education, mobility has particular educational value because it makes it possible to compare protocols, discuss regional health problems and broaden understanding of diverse health realities. The internationalisation of medical education has been advocated as a means of training professionals capable of acting with a global perspective, intercultural sensitivity and a collaborative orientation (Wu et al., 2022; Wijnen-Meijer, 2023). The lecture on preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV and the comparison of protocols between Bolivia and Ecuador are specific examples of how mobility can connect teaching, public health and contextualised exchange.

The physical mobility analysed is complemented by virtual modes of internationalisation. Recent literature on internationalisation at a distance, virtual exchange and mirror classes has shown that technologies can broaden access to international experiences, reduce costs and prepare relationships that can subsequently be deepened through in-person meetings (Mittelmeier et al., 2021; O'Dowd, 2021; Çalıkoğlu et al., 2024). In this experience, the previous mirror class served as a prelude to outgoing mobility, which suggests a hybrid and progressive model: first virtual cooperation, then in-person mobility, followed by collaborative projects.

A distinctive aspect of the case was its bidirectionality. The participant not only gained knowledge from the host university; she also shared USGP practices in clinical simulation, OSCEs and teaching methodologies. This reciprocity is key to avoiding asymmetrical relationships and promoting fairer internationalisation, particularly among Latin American institutions that share economic, curricular and management challenges. In keeping with current debates on academic mobility, international trajectories should be analysed not only in terms of movement, but also in terms of the conditions, hierarchies and actual possibilities for the circulation of knowledge (Shen et al., 2022; Gérard & Lebeau, 2023).

From an institutional perspective, the main recommendation is to turn each mobility experience into a unit of organisational learning. This entails designing a preliminary pathway with objectives, responsibilities and expected outputs; providing support during the stay; collecting evidence; evaluating the perceptions of the participant and the counterpart; and translating the results into curricular actions, publications, projects or new cooperation activities. In the case studied, the existence of possible comparative projects on diabetes, HPV, breast cancer and cardiometabolic risk represents an opportunity to demonstrate impact beyond the individual experience.

The study has limitations. As a case study with a single participant, the results are not statistically generalisable. Nor were interviews with students, lecturers or authorities from the host university included, or medium-term impact indicators. Future research could adopt mixed designs, include multiple faculty mobility experiences, compare perceptions from home and host universities, and evaluate verifiable outputs such as publications, projects, resulting mirror classes, curricular changes or student participation in networks.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The outgoing faculty mobility from the USGP Medicine Programme to UPDS was perceived as a highly positive and academically beneficial experience with the potential to strengthen institutional internationalisation. The stay enabled teaching, research, methodological exchange, academic advisory, cultural integration and collaborative project planning activities to be carried out. The main contributions identified were the professional enrichment of the participating lecturer, the bidirectional transfer of good practices, the strengthening of interinstitutional links, curriculum internationalisation and the opening of shared lines of research between Ecuador and Bolivia.

As an institutional improvement, it is recommended that an outgoing faculty mobility protocol be established, with a single list of documents, personnel responsible for each phase, an administrative timetable, a follow-up mechanism, subsequent evaluation and the definition of expected academic outputs. It is also suggested that in-person mobility be linked to mirror classes, virtual exchange, student research groups, joint publications and scientific dissemination activities to ensure sustainability and academic impact.

Declarations

This article contributes to the research project entitled: Innovative strategy for managing the internationalisation process in health sciences programmes

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FURTHER STUDY

This study still has limitations, so further research is needed on the topic of Outgoing Faculty Mobility and Internationalisation in Medical Education: Perceptions of an Ecuador–Bolivia Cooperation Experience to improve this study and add insights for both the authors and readers.

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