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THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS MOBILITY ON WAGES

Valentina Ferri

1. Introduction

The paper investigates the hypothesis that the participation in international student mobility increases wages.

In the literature, few studies assess the impact of international mobility on graduates’ employment and wages. The articles that provide causal evidence are based on the method of Instrumental Variables (Oosterbeek and Webbink 2006; Messer and Wolter 2007; Di Pietro 2015) and Propensity Score Matching (Rodrigues 2013, Favero and Fucci, 2017; Iriondo 2019).

The data used in this article come from the Italian National Institute of Statistics. In particular, we use data from the survey on university graduates' vocational integration, a survey conducted by ISTAT that aims to investigate the transition of graduates (3 and 5 years course) from university to employment four years after graduation.

The dependent variable in our empirical analysis is log of monthly wages and our explanatory variable of interest is a dichotomous variable that indicates graduates’ participation in an international mobility program during their university studies.

The independent variables in the model concern personal attributes, fields of study, parental education and employment, university location.

First, we estimate the mincerian equation of wages, we distinguish between the full time equivalent monthly wages, including all the workers of the sample, and only the workers full time. Heckman's two-step procedure allows us to take into account the sample selection.

In order to estimate a less biased assessment of international mobility programs on wages, we use the Propensity score matching technique and we estimate the Average Treatment Effect on the Treated.

The paper is organized as follows: the first section is an introduction; the second part includes a brief analysis on International mobility and Erasmus programs to contextualize the research; the third section is a short literature review; the fourth section consists of the description of the data and methodology; the fifth part regards
the empirical results. Finally, the last section draws out some concluding remarks and policy implications.

2. International mobility and Erasmus programme

For what regards short-term mobility, the Erasmus programme, financed by the European Commission, has had a decisive role. Italy is ranked fourth for students who participated in an Erasmus mobility program in 2016 (27,095), after Germany (32,138), Spain (31,120) and French (29,851)

Data from Erasmus statistics reveal that Italy had a steady increase in students leaving for a period abroad; the other countries have similar trends, except for Spain that in the last years (2012-2013) shows a decline of participants in study abroad programs (Fig.1).

Because of the growth of mobility projects and students involvement, in literature there are many studies about the determinants of international mobility experiences, but few studies assess the impact with evidence-based methods.

Figure 1 - Trends in the number of Erasmus students in Italy, Spain Germany and French.

The latest available data on Italian students international mobility² reveal that the share of women who participated in study abroad programs in 2013/2014 is 58%. The average duration of this period abroad for Italian students is 6.1 months.

Furthermore, it emerges also that Italian students who leave for foreign destinations are enrolled in humanistic, economic, political-social and engineering faculties.

The universities with the highest number of Erasmus students are located mainly in Milan (14.6%), Rome (11.6%), Bologna (7.5%), Turin (6.5%), Padua (5.4%). The languages studied during the Erasmus period are: English (41%), Spanish (26.4%), French (14.9%) and German (10.3%).

3. Previous studies

Various studies based on data survey investigate how the participants in abroad study programs perceive the role of international experience in their post-university outcomes.

Orahood et al. (2004) show that 96% of students participating in international mobility programs suggest that their international experience made a difference in their career plan; 50% of respondents say that the impact has been significant and notable. Teichler and Janson (2007) conduct an analogous study, based on survey data. The survey of 2005 addressed to students who have participated to the Erasmus program in academic year 2000-2001. They show that 54% of them indicate that the international mobility program helped them to find their first job.

Varghese (2008) finds that international mobility programs are prestigious because the participants have better-paid employment opportunities and enhance their professional networks. King et al. (2010) find that participation in international mobility programs improves employability. The analysis is based on interviews of mobility managers of UK universities.

Di Pietro’s analysis demonstrates, using a large sample of graduates, how mobility programs impact on employment likelihood. The author uses these methods: OLS estimates, fixed effects and instrumental variables. The estimates based on IV fixed effects method show that the participants in student mobility programs have 24 percentage points more of probability of employment than their peers. The effect is significant only for graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds. Probably this result is related to the opportunity offered to students that otherwise would not have had the same opportunity (Di Pietro, 2015).

Oosterbeek and Webink (2006) find that a year abroad increases wages of Dutch university students of 3–10 per cent, when they use instrumental variables the effect disappears. Messer and Wolter (2007) demonstrate that when the estimates are not corrected for the selection bias, the salaries of Swiss university students increase, while with correction of bias, the effect is not significant.

Rodrigues (2013) finds that the students who participated in study abroad programs earn 3% more than their peers, but these results vary according to the field of studies. The positive effects regard only Social Sciences and Engineering.
Favero and Fucci (2017) use panel data to study the Erasmus impact on wages, the random effects model yielded a positive and significant increase in salaries of about 7% for Erasmus participants. The estimates based on Propensity score matching technique show that the wage premium of Erasmus students is about 8%. A positive wage differential is found using as instrumental variable: the exposure to international student exchange schemes. Its magnitude, however, is much larger and imprecise.

Iriondo (2019) uses the Propensity Score Matching (PSM) technique in order to obtain a less biased estimation of the impact of mobility on employment and wages.

The conclusions of Iriondo (2019) are that Erasmus mobility programs have a positive impact in the medium term on salaries. Students who spent a period abroad, had no significant short-term effect on either employment or salaries, while 6 years after graduation have a 10.6 per cent higher probability of having a job and salaries 10–12 per cent higher than their peers.

4. Data and methodology

The data used in the article come from ISTAT. The Italian National Institute of Statistics carries out the sample survey on graduates who attained the university degree four years before the survey. It is part of the survey-system on the study-to-work-transition and detects graduates’ employment conditions about four years after graduation. The survey collects a large amount of information: educational experience; access to the labor market; job search and family situation.

First, we estimate the mincerian equation of wages (1); we distinguish between the full time equivalent monthly wages, including all the workers of the sample, and only the workers full time.

\[ y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{InternMob} + \beta_2 X + \beta_3 S + \beta_4 G + \epsilon \]  \( (1) \)

Our explanatory variable of interest is a dichotomous variable taking on the value 1 if the graduate participated in a study abroad program during his/her university studies, and 0 otherwise.

X is a vector of individual traits that are thought to influence wages; S stands for dummy variables related to the fields of studies; G represents the dummy variables related to the geographical area of university attendance and the area of residency before enrolment, \( \epsilon \) is the error term.

We drop from the sample graduates who do not have a job, graduates who are studying and graduates who are seeking employment when our \( y \) is log monthly wages. If the graduate is actually working, the wage is observed. For people out of the labour market, we cannot observe the wages. In order to solve the problem of the
selection bias, we estimate in the first stage the probability of employment, using the Heckman methods two stages.

Moreover, we estimate Average Treatment Effect on the Treated (ATET) effects by Propensity-score matching (Rosenbaum, Rubin, 1983) to solve account bias due to self-selection. Propensity-score matching and in particular Nearest–neighbour matching attributes the missing potential outcome for each graduates by using an average of the outcomes of similar graduates that receive the other treatment level. Similarity between subjects is founded on estimated treatment probabilities (propensity scores).

ATET is identified if:

\[ E(Y(0) | W = 1) - E(Y(0) | W = 0) = 0 \]  

(2)

i.e. if the outcomes of graduates from the treatment and comparison groups would not differ in the absence of treatment. Propensity based matching is used to select control graduates who are similar to patient receiving treatment. The treatment in this study is the Participation in an International Mobility Program.

The ATET \( \delta_1 \), is defined as:

\[ \delta_1 = E(Y_{1i} - Y_{0i} | T_i = 1) = E(Y_{1i} | T_i = 1) - E(Y_{0i} | T_i = 1) \]  

(3)

ATET measures the treatment effect among those who had participated in the mobility program \( T_i = 1 \). \( Y_{1i} \) represents result under treatment, the level of wages of graduates who participated in a mobility program (treated), while \( Y_{0i} \) represents the result of graduates who did not participate in a mobility program (control).

We have used the method nearest neighbour: the graduate from the control group is chosen as a matching partner for a graduate who participated in mobility program that is closest in terms of propensity score.

The variable included in the regressions analysis are:

- Participation in international mobility: this is our variable of interest and varies between 0 and 1, taking value 0 if the students didn’t participate in an International mobility Program, value 1 if participated.
- Gender: varies between 0 and 1, female takes the value 1, male 0.
- Age classes: the first class represents individuals who graduated at age 23-24; the second class includes individuals who graduated from 25 years to 29 years; the third class is constituted by individuals who graduated over 30 years.
- High school mark: these marks are divided in three classes, from the lowest marks to the highest ones.
- Duration of studies: this variable specifies the number of years of studies
- Overeducation: specifies if the individual is more educated than is useful for their role in the labour market (this measure is self-perceived).
- Master’s degree: takes the value 1 if the graduate has a master’s degree, 0 otherwise.
- Works in the south: takes the value 1 if the graduate works in the south of Italy, 0 if works in another area.
- Works abroad: takes the value 1 if the graduate works abroad, 0 if works in another area.
- Field of University degree: the fields take into account are the Medical and Health degree; Engineering, Architecture and Agronomy; Degree in Chemistry, Biology and Pharmacy; Degree in Economics, Political sciences and Law (this is the reference category).

For what concerns the Heckman correction, the variables included to estimate the probability to be employed (0/1) are:
- Not married: takes the value 1 if the individual is not married, 0 otherwise.
- Graduated father: takes the value 1 if the father is graduated, 0 for lower educational levels.
- Graduated mother: takes the value 1 if the mother is graduated, 0 for lower educational levels.
- Father employed: takes the value 1 if the father is employed, 0 otherwise.
- Mother employed: takes the value 1 if the mother is employed, 0 otherwise.
- Area of residence before university: South takes value 1, 0 otherwise.

In order to identify the common support for ATT based on Propensity Score Matching (1983), the variables included are: gender, the field of graduation at the most disaggregated level possible, the employment situation of the mother and the educational level of the father and mother.

5. Descriptive analysis

The table provides summary statistics for the variables used in the analysis. First, the graduates that participated in study abroad programs are 75.5%; not far from those who have never had the experience of mobility (74.3%). The participants in study abroad programs who work in a foreign country are 19%, the difference amounts to 15 percentage points compared to those who do not participate in study programs abroad.

Graduates who have participated in international mobility, have a permanent contract in 56% of cases, those who have remained in Italy to study instead have in 59% of cases a permanent contract. In 60% of cases the graduates who have had an experience abroad have a masters’ degree. Graduation mark is slightly higher for those who participated in an Erasmus or similar program (105.33), compared to non-
participants (102.38). Even the diploma grade is on average higher among the participants by about 3 points. The share of transfer students involved in a study programs abroad is 10 percentage points higher than the share of students that has not participate to program. The percentage of employees is similar. The earnings of those who took part in a study program abroad are on average about 140 euros higher.

**Table 1- Descriptive statistics treatment (International mobility=1) and control group (International mobility=0).**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>International mobility=1</th>
<th></th>
<th>International mobility=0</th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>sd</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>mean</td>
<td>sd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers</td>
<td>5261</td>
<td>.75553</td>
<td>.429809</td>
<td>50653</td>
<td>.743684</td>
<td>.436602</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work abroad</td>
<td>4634</td>
<td>.19970</td>
<td>.392110</td>
<td>42221</td>
<td>.042947</td>
<td>.202739</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent worker</td>
<td>2715</td>
<td>.59633</td>
<td>.496522</td>
<td>25630</td>
<td>.593257</td>
<td>.491236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>5261</td>
<td>.57786</td>
<td>.493947</td>
<td>50653</td>
<td>.589017</td>
<td>.492017</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>5155</td>
<td>.59680</td>
<td>.490587</td>
<td>49555</td>
<td>.431624</td>
<td>.495308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation mark</td>
<td>5261</td>
<td>105.33</td>
<td>6.492</td>
<td>50653</td>
<td>102.378</td>
<td>7.968</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school mark</td>
<td>5187</td>
<td>86.465</td>
<td>12.0027</td>
<td>50101</td>
<td>83.2172</td>
<td>12.5773</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offsite students</td>
<td>2225</td>
<td>.67333</td>
<td>.469099</td>
<td>13886</td>
<td>.571330</td>
<td>.494904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee</td>
<td>3829</td>
<td>.71710</td>
<td>.450646</td>
<td>37630</td>
<td>.691847</td>
<td>.461736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wage</td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>1620.08</td>
<td>7377.31</td>
<td>33514</td>
<td>1477.80</td>
<td>6411.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s elaboration on ISTAT data

6. **Empirical analysis**

A first visual summary of wage distributions is provided in Figures 1 for participants in International Mobility Programs and for people who does not participate. Figure 1 shows a Kernel estimate of density, highlighting differences between graduates who have taken the mobility path and those who have remained in Italy. We observe that the earnings distribution is characterized by a higher density function around the mode. Nevertheless, the graph highlights the high level of concentration of graduates who participated in an International mobility program in the right side of distribution.

In order to control for these differences and to study wage differentials, we estimate wage regressions.
The table 2 reports estimates of the full time equivalent monthly wages (log); the monthly wages for full time employees (log) and the monthly wages with Heckman correction (log). The estimates of the simple ols equation contain all control variables. The international mobility program increases (log)wages of about 6.2%. Even considering only full time workers, the increase does not change.

The wage penalty for graduate female is -9%. The wages increase of 4.1% for students who worked during their studies. The overeducated graduates, graduates more educated than is useful for their role in the labour market, are associated with a significant decrease in wages. Master’s degree increases the salary of about 9%.

Workers that live in the South of Italy gain 15.7% less than the other, while workers living abroad earn about 30% more than similar Italian workers.

Depending on the field of the university degree, we observe the following differences in wages: the degree in medical health disciplines seems to be associated with an increase in salary of 16.2 percentage points if we consider full time equivalent wages, of 13.7 percentage points if we consider only full time.

If the university degree is in a humanities field, such as literature, languages, psychology, education sciences, the average wage tends to decrease about 6.8
percentage points (6.7 p.p. with Heckman correction) compared to the salary of graduates in economic, law and political sciences.

Table 2 – Regression results full time equivalent monthly wages (log), only full time and full time equivalent with Heckman correction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Log monthly wages (FTE)</th>
<th>Log monthly wages (full time)</th>
<th>Log monthly wages FTE (Heckman)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International Mobility</td>
<td>0.062***</td>
<td>0.063***</td>
<td>0.064***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-0.011</td>
<td>-0.012</td>
<td>-0.011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age class 23-24</td>
<td>-0.021</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-0.023*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age class 25 - 29</td>
<td>-0.013</td>
<td>-0.015</td>
<td>-0.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age class &gt; = 30</td>
<td>-0.014</td>
<td>-0.016</td>
<td>-0.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school marks (76-95)</td>
<td>0.036*</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>0.031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school marks (96-101)</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of studies</td>
<td>-0.007***</td>
<td>-0.005**</td>
<td>-0.007**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overeducated</td>
<td>-0.054***</td>
<td>-0.041***</td>
<td>-0.054**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>0.080***</td>
<td>0.118***</td>
<td>0.091**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works in the south</td>
<td>-0.157***</td>
<td>-0.152***</td>
<td>-0.165**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works abroad</td>
<td>0.330***</td>
<td>0.293***</td>
<td>0.355**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine (health) degree</td>
<td>0.162***</td>
<td>0.137***</td>
<td>0.161**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree in engineering, architecture and agriculture</td>
<td>0.004</td>
<td>0.012</td>
<td>0.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree in chemistry, physics, biology</td>
<td>0.066***</td>
<td>0.020*</td>
<td>0.067***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree in letters, languages, psychology Employed (0/1)</td>
<td>-0.068***</td>
<td>-0.121***</td>
<td>-0.066***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>-0.012</td>
<td>-0.015</td>
<td>0.090***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The variables included to matching the graduated treated and the control are gender, the field of graduation at the most disaggregated level possible, the employment situation of the mother and the educational level of the father and mother. The balancing property is satisfied.

These estimates, based on 3817 treated units and 23420 control units, regard propensity score matching. The ln of wages increases of 9.6% for individuals who have participated in abroad programs. This result is statistically significant and confirms the hypotheses that the participation in an international mobility experience increases wages.

**Tabella 5 - Average Treatment on Treated of International Mobility on (ln)monthly wages.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>n. treat.</th>
<th>n. contr.</th>
<th>ATT</th>
<th>Std. Err.</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3817</td>
<td>23420</td>
<td>0.096</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>11.579</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Author’s elaboration on ISTAT data.
7. Conclusions and policy implications

For the 2014-2020 programming period, the Erasmus Plus program has provided a significant increase in funding compared to the previous period with an important focus on employability. One of its main goals is to enhance the level of skills and abilities, in particular, but not only, related to the labour market (Council of European Union, 2012).

Despite the popularity of international mobility programs, little research has been carried out on this topic. Our paper investigates the hypotheses that international students mobility increases wages. We estimates average treatment effects on treated from observational data by propensity-score matching. From the point of view of the implications in terms of policy, the study conducted suggests that participation in international mobility projects makes graduates more competitive: we find that the participation in international mobility programs increases the (ln)wages of 9.6%.

The results represent a first step of research on the relationship between international mobility and wages; so we will continue, in fact, other testing methods that can strengthen the evidence emerged from this analysis. It will be useful, therefore, to use instrumental variables to compare these initial results and to take into account the different exposure to "treatment", in fact there are some characteristics that could affect the participation to an international mobility program. Among the possible further developments it is also considered appropriate to replicate the estimates on data from the same survey relating to previous years to verify whether the same dynamics found can be observed even in different periods.

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SUMMARY

The impact of international students mobility on wages

The paper investigates the hypotheses that the participation in international student mobility increases wages. At this aim, we use the data of the survey on university graduates' vocational integration conducted by ISTAT, that investigates the transition of graduates from university to employment four years after graduation. First, we estimate the mincerian equation of wages, we distinguish between the full time equivalent monthly wages, including all the workers of the sample, and only the workers full time. Heckman's two-step procedure allows us to take into account sample selection.

In order to estimate a less biased assessment of international mobility experience on wages, we use the propensity score matching technique and we estimate the Average Treatment Effect on the Treated.

The OLS regressions show that international mobility experience increases (log)wages and the estimated effect of study abroad program participation confirms this finding.

We estimate average treatment effects on treated from observational data by propensity-score matching. We find that the international mobility experience increases the (ln)wages of 9.6%.

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