

International Students Participation in Extracurricular Activities Focusing on Career Development: A Case of a Hungarian University

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This study investigates international students' participation in extracurricular activities (ECAs) that support career development at Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE), Hungary. Previous research highlights that ECAs also have benefits in enhancing employability and career readiness. However, international students in non-English-speaking countries face limited awareness of career services and restricted access to structured job placement programmes. This study addresses these gaps by examining students' engagement in career-focused ECAs, their awareness of career development resources, and their post-graduation career aspirations. Discoveries from the findings suggest low participation rates in internships, career counselling, and skill-building workshops despite their availability. Additionally, the study revealed that among the 74 participants, there was a lack of knowledge of existing career resources, which influences their employment prospects in Hungary and beyond. The study emphasises the need for targeted career support initiatives, enhanced university-industry collaboration, and improved communication strategies to integrate international students into the labour market.

Keywords: International students, career development, extracurricular activities, higher education institution, student engagement

Introduction

Studying abroad offers rich opportunities for language development, cultural immersion, and a global perspective. It enhances adaptability and intercultural awareness, traits valued by employers but often perceived as intangible. Many students struggle to articulate their experiences as marketable skills in job applications. With adequate support, an international study can significantly strengthen career prospects by linking academic learning to employability outcomes (Nilsson & Ripmeester, 2016).

The growth in international student mobility highlights the need to explore how study abroad experiences support both personal development and employability. This study investigates international students' participation in career development activities at Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) in Hungary, focusing on initiatives aimed at preparing them for the labour market. It examines how students in English-language programmes engage with extracurricular opportunities to enhance career readiness at a Hungarian institution in East-Central Europe.

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In higher education, career guidance is increasingly recognised as a critical institutional function, serving as a bridge between academic learning and entry into the labour market. A systematic review by Soares, Carvalho, and Silva (2022) revealed that well-structured, research-informed career interventions contribute significantly to enhancing students' employability, fostering clearer career goals, and strengthening adaptability. These findings point to the necessity of embedding career development services within the university framework, particularly for international students who often face additional challenges in navigating foreign labour markets. Supporting this view, Sampson, Lenz, Reardon, Peterson, Osborn, Dozier, Hayden, Makela, Bullock-Yowell and Mark (2023) advocate for differentiated models of career counselling, where support is tailored according to individual student profiles and levels of career readiness, a fundamental approach in multicultural academic settings.

Within the Hungarian context, the Higher Education Student Advisory Association (Felsőoktatási Tanácsadás Egyesület – FETA), established at ELTE in 1995, has been instrumental in advancing the professionalisation of student advising and career support. One of its recent works, *Intercultural Counselling in Hungarian Higher Education* (Füleki & Puskás-Vajda, 2021), outlines the development of intercultural advising strategies and their application across increasingly diverse student groups. Additionally, the scholarly contributions of Magda Ritoók, (Established the Higher Education Counselling Association and played a pioneering role in the development of psychological counselling services in academia at ELTE) exemplify the depth of educational and psychological expertise informing Hungary's student support landscape. Nevertheless, these national-level advancements are not always prominently reflected in international academic discourse, suggesting a need for more intentional integration of local practices into broader discussions on international student support systems.

Globalisation and internationalisation have diversified student populations in higher education, introducing both challenges and benefits. International students in non-English-speaking countries often study in English and seek ways to engage with university life. In response, universities have adopted strategies to promote inclusion, bilingualism, and global citizenship (Simoni & Georgoudaki, 2019).

International student enrolment in higher education programmes across OECD countries has grown significantly over the past decade. In Hungary, international students now make up approximately 13.5% of all tertiary students, according to the *Education at a Glance 2022* report by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2022).

Hungary reflects global patterns in student mobility, with international enrolment tripling from 11,783 in 2001 to 38,422 in 2020. Students from 163 countries now study in Hungary, boosting institutional diversity and economic growth. Császár, Tarrosy, Dobos, Varjas and Alpek (2023) highlight East-Central Europe's rise as a study destination, driven by scholarships and shifting student flows from traditional host nations.

While higher education institutions across Europe continue to embrace internationalisation, the transition of international graduates into national labour markets remains hindered by complex legal frameworks, particularly for individuals from non-European Union (third) countries. At the European level, the revised European Union (EU) Blue Card Directive (Council Directive 2009/50/EC, amended in 2021) was introduced to attract highly qualified professionals by easing access to residence and employment opportunities. However, national-level implementation remains inconsistent, with several countries enforcing strict admission criteria such as elevated salary thresholds and limited occupational access (OECD, 2025).

In Hungary, recent policy changes have further restricted the ability of third-country graduates to remain in the country after completing their studies. The introduction of the new “guest worker” law, in force since January 2024 (Government Decree 407/2023), sets out more stringent requirements for non-EU nationals. These

include the need for specialised expertise, employer sponsorship, and employment in fields identified as experiencing labour shortages. Even international graduates who have received job offers often encounter legal and procedural barriers that prevent them from securing long-term employment or residence.

These developments disproportionately affect graduates from countries such as China, Nigeria, India, among others, who may struggle to meet the heightened regulatory demands despite holding academic qualifications and market-relevant skills. In this context, Hungarian universities may be disincentivised from expanding career support for non-EU students if national policy frameworks do not facilitate their post-study retention. This disconnection between higher education and immigration policy highlights the need for a coordinated “brain gain” approach, as seen in countries like Germany, Portugal, and the Netherlands, which actively support the integration of international graduates into their economies (European Migration Network, 2021). Without such alignment, institutional efforts to enhance employability risk being undermined by broader structural exclusion.

Theoretical Background of International Student Participation at the University

International student participation in higher education and its impact on career development have been analysed through various theoretical lenses. Key factors influencing career choices include meaningful work, good pay, and supportive relationships (Nilsson & Ripmeester, 2016). While Hofstede’s cultural dimensions have informed these analyses, critics argue that its static view of culture overlooks the evolving career goals of students in globalised contexts (McSweeney, 2002), and response bias remains a concern in cross-national studies.

Research rarely focuses on international students in East-Central Europe and their transition to employment. Though often grouped in mobility studies, these countries face distinct socio-economic conditions that shape career outcomes (Harzing, 2004). As Harvey (2010) notes, compared to Western Europe, the region lacks structured career readiness initiatives. This study explores how Hungarian HEIs support international students in pursuing careers locally or abroad.

The student participation framework offers insight into international student engagement in career development. Trowler (2010) views participation as encompassing academics, extracurriculars, and governance. However, scholars note that HEIs often adopt vague strategies, overlooking international students’ unique challenges. These include language barriers, cultural adjustment, and limited awareness of career services (Islam, Burnett & Collins, 2021), highlighting the need for tailored institutional approaches.

The student-as-consumer model has gained momentum in neoliberal higher education, framing students as investors seeking career outcomes (Tight, 2013). This perspective encourages universities to strengthen career services and employability-focused ECAs. However, critics argue it prioritises market needs over holistic learning (Molesworth, Scullion & Nixon, 2011). Mendes and Hammett (2023) note a paradox: international students are urged to participate, yet often face institutional barriers that limit their access to these opportunities.

Internationalisation and Career Support for International Students in Hungarian Higher Education

With rising international student enrolment, demand for career support aligned with labour market needs is growing. The Bologna Process and EU modernisation agenda position HEIs as central to enhancing employab-

ility through academic and experiential learning (Klemenčič, 2012). However, gaps remain; while many students prioritise career services, only about half report satisfaction (HEPI, 2021).

International graduates face structural challenges in transitioning to the workforce, including language barriers, visa restrictions, and limited networks (Harzing, 2004). Erasmus+ and university-industry partnerships help by offering internships and mentorships (Nilsson & Ripmeester, 2016). Kovacs and Kasza (2018) call for policy incentives to hire international graduates, while Mendes and Hammett (2023) urge career services to reflect students' varied career goals.

Internationalisation is a growing focus in higher education, promoting global engagement across institutional objectives. Knight (2004) defines it as integrating cross-cultural and global perspectives into university systems. Hungary reflects this trend by attracting international students and offering career support initiatives, particularly at institutions like ELTE.

Hungarian scholars have explored internationalisation and career support for international students. Vincze and Bács (2020) stress that internships and university-industry ties improve employability. Pusztai et al (2016) find that tailored career counselling aids professional integration, though services are often underused due to language barriers and limited student awareness.

Szemerszki and Malota (2019) found that many international students remain in Hungary or the EU due to job opportunities that they access through university networks. Scholarships also shape career paths by offering internships and job fairs. Key programmes include Stipendium Hungaricum, the Hungarian Diaspora Scholarship, and others supporting targeted student groups (Mucsi, Malota & Török, 2020; Casas Trujillo, Mohammed & Salleh, 2020). Vincze and Bács (2020) notes that international students in Hungary face significant challenges in securing employment post-graduation, primarily due to work permit restrictions and limited integration with local labour markets. His research suggests that expanding mentorship programmes, improving access to job placement services, and increasing collaboration between universities and multinational companies could significantly enhance international graduates' employability.

Research Questions

This study takes a comprehensive approach to explore international students' views on their participation in various aspects of university life that contribute to their career development and job prospects after graduation. The goal was to conduct an empirical investigation into an under-researched topic within higher education institutions. Building on this foundation, the research will examine the extent of international students' interest and their engagement in extracurricular activities designed to enhance employment opportunities after graduation. Based on a literature review of international student engagement, the study focuses on international students' participation in ECAs. In line with this aim, the study addresses the following research questions:

- R1. How well do international students know about the university's career development activities after graduation?
- R2. How often do international students participate in extracurricular activities or hands-on learning that helps with career development?
- R3. Where do international students plan to work or build their careers in the future?

Research Methodology

Population and Participants

This study surveyed international students enrolled at ELTE during the 2023–2024 academic year. While the total survey sample consisted of 112 participants, only 74 respondents completed the items relevant to this section of the study. As such, the analysis presented here is based on these 74 responses.

The sample was designed to reflect the diverse demographic and academic composition of ELTE's international student body, which consists of over 4,000 students from more than 120 countries, spanning various faculties and degree levels. Participants in this study included students from Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral programmes, ensuring a well-rounded representation of perspectives within the international student community.

Although the sample represents a fraction of ELTE's total international student population, it was sufficient for the study's objectives. According to Creswell (2009), well-defined populations can yield reliable and meaningful insights even with smaller sample sizes. A power analysis further confirmed the statistical adequacy of the sample in detecting significant patterns related to international student engagement in career-based extracurricular activities (ECAs). By ensuring a diverse selection of participants, this study maintains representational validity and strengthens its ability to address the research questions comprehensively.

Sample Selection

To ensure a diverse participant pool, recruitment efforts targeted international students across different engagement levels, active participants in student organisations, attendees of career-related extracurricular activities, and students with minimal engagement. The survey was distributed using multiple channels:

- Online forums and social media platforms popular among ELTE's international students.
- QR codes distributed at career fairs, university events, and student gatherings.
- Direct outreach through faculty-student representatives and dormitory networks.

Rationale for Convenience Sampling

Given time constraints and resource availability, convenience sampling was employed for participant selection. While this non-probability sampling method limits the generalizability of findings to the broader international student population, it remains a widely accepted approach in exploratory research and studies constrained by access or time (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016). Convenience sampling is particularly suitable for generating initial insights and understanding contextual factors when the research aims to explore specific phenomena within a defined setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, the method was appropriate for capturing the unique dynamics of international student engagement at ELTE. To minimise potential sampling biases, the survey was disseminated across multiple platforms and faculties, ensuring representation from a broad range of academic programmes and student backgrounds.

Measuring Tool: Questionnaire Design and Validation

A custom-designed questionnaire was the primary tool for assessing international students' engagement in career-related ECAs and their perceptions of career support at ELTE. The questionnaire was developed by the authors and made to align with the research objectives, focusing on:

1. International students' involvement in career-focused extracurricular activities (e.g., internships, career workshops, job fairs).
2. Perceived accessibility and effectiveness of career services at ELTE.
3. Future career aspirations and employment preferences of international students.

Before data collection, ethical approval was obtained from ELTE's Faculty of Education and Psychology, which was approved on December 1, approval number: 2023/576. Additionally, a pilot study involving four international students was conducted to refine the clarity and relevance of survey items.

Questionnaire Design and Item Clarity

The primary instrument for data collection in this study was a custom-designed questionnaire developed by the researchers to explore international students' engagement in career-related activities and their perceptions of institutional support. The questionnaire was constructed based on a review of literature on student participation, career development, and mobility in higher education (e.g., Tinto, 1993; Glass & Westmont, 2014), and was tailored to fit the specific context of ELTE. In addition, some relationships were not tested with inferential statistics. As a result, future studies will be designed with more analysis-friendly formats to facilitate broader statistical exploration (e.g. correlation tests, regression analysis).

The survey consisted of both closed-ended and multiple-choice questions. It was structured into key thematic sections, including demographic data, student engagement in extracurricular activities (ECAs), awareness and utilisation of career services, and post-graduation aspirations. For example, students were asked:

"How actively do you participate in these university activities and programmes listed below, aimed at improving your opportunities after graduation?" With response options on a five-point Likert-style frequency scale: Never, Very Rarely, Rarely, Most of the Time, and Always.

Another item asked:

"To what extent did participating in the activities listed below positively help develop your career development and job readiness prospects?" With response categories: Not at all Helpful, Slightly Helpful, Moderately Helpful, Very Helpful, and Extremely Helpful.

These examples reflect the design intention to capture both the frequency of engagement and the perceived effectiveness of various institutional supports, particularly those relevant to career development.

Development and Structure

The study did not directly adopt an existing questionnaire; it was structured following well-established research methodologies to ensure contextual relevance to ELTE and international student experiences in Hungary.

The survey consisted of two key sections. The first focused on participation in career-related ECAs, examining students' involvement in internships, career fairs, networking events, mentorship programmes, and their awareness of university-provided career support services. The second section explored career aspirations and employment preferences, including preferred post-graduation destinations (Hungary, another European country, home country, or elsewhere) and students' knowledge of ELTE's career programmes supporting job market preparation. The questionnaire combined Likert-scale items and multiple-choice questions, allowing for quantitative analysis of participation in career-related ECAs.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics, which provided statistical insights into international students' participation in career-based ECAs. The findings from SPSS were subsequently exported into Microsoft Excel for enhanced graphical representation and visualisation of key findings.

Sample Description

Based Programme Level

The study included 74 international students representing diverse academic levels:

- 30 students (41%) in Bachelor's programmes
- 29 students (39%) in Master's programmes
- 15 students (20%) in Doctoral (PhD) programmes

Participant Demographics by Geographical Background

The respondents represented a diverse range of geographical backgrounds, with participants originating from six major regions. The largest group (38%) came from Asia, followed by Africa (20%), ensuring significant representation from these regions. Europe (16%) and the Middle East (12%) contributed notably to the respondent pool, reflecting the broad reach of international student enrolment. Additionally, South America (11%) and North America (3%) were represented, further reinforcing the study's global perspective. This distribution of respondents enhances the study's ability to capture varied international student experiences, providing valuable insights into their career engagement and academic integration.

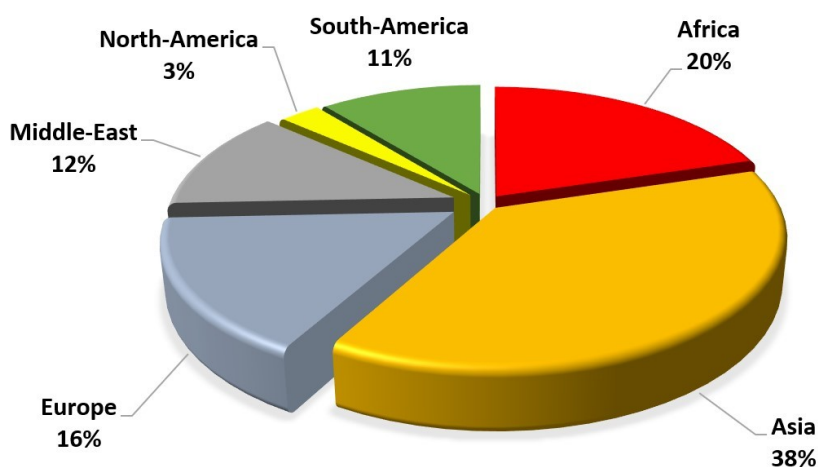


Figure 1. Geographical background of the 74 respondents. Source:
Elaborated by the authors based on data collected through a questionnaire

Participant Demographics by Duration of Study and Stay in Hungary

About 71% of the study participants had lived and studied in Hungary for less than three years. A smaller group, about 29%, had spent three to five years or more in the country and at the university. This distribution highlights the different levels of experience and integration that international students who participated in this

study have within Hungary's higher education system, offering valuable insights into their engagement and involvement.

Number of Years in Hungary and Study at ELTE	Number of the Students
Less than 3 years	52
3-5 years or more	22

Table 1. Participant Demographics by Duration of Study and Stay in Hungary. Source: Elaborated by the authors based on data collected through a questionnaire

Number of International Students Participants in the Study Based on Faculties

We had participants in the survey from seven faculties (i.e., Faculty of Law, the Faculty of Humanities, the Faculty of Economics, the Faculty of Education and Psychology, the Faculty of Informatics, the Faculty of Science, and the Faculty of Social Sciences) of the nine faculties of ELTE. It is because neither the Bárczi Gusztáv Faculty of Special Needs Education nor the Faculty of Primary and Pre-School Education launch English language programmes.

Faculties	Faculty of Science (TTK)	Faculty of Social Sciences (TATK)	Faculty of Humanities (BTK)	Faculty of Education and Psychology (PPK)	Faculty of Law (AJK)	Faculty of Economics (GTK)	Faculty of Informatics (IK)
Number of Participants	13	8	4	23	4	8	14

Table 2. Number of International Students Participants in the Study Based on Faculties. Source: Elaborated by the authors based on data collected through a questionnaire

Age Distribution of Respondents

The participants in this study represented a diverse range of age groups, reflecting a well-balanced sample of international students at ELTE. The most significant proportion of respondents (45%) were between the ages of 26 and 35, followed closely by those in the 21-25 age group (43%). A smaller percentage (9%) of respondents were under 21, while 3% were in the 36-45 age group. This distribution suggests the varied age backgrounds of international students, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of their career development experiences in higher education.

Findings

Findings of Research Question One: International Students' Level of Information on University Career Development Activities after Graduation

This section addresses how well international students at ELTE are informed about career development activities after graduation. The findings are organised according to two main categories: the duration of enrolment at the university and the distribution across faculties. These two categories were chosen for this analysis as they give us the best opportunity to reveal critical insights into patterns of awareness based on students' years at ELTE and faculties.

Based on the Duration of Years of Enrolment at ELTE

The survey analysis reveals varying levels of awareness among participants regarding the career opportunities and resources available at the university to support their transition into the workforce. The most significant proportion of respondents reported having some information, with most being students who have spent less than 3 years at the university. A smaller portion belonged to the 3 to 5 years category. A notable percentage of students indicated that they had no information about career services, particularly among those enrolled for less than 3 years, suggesting a gap in early awareness of career-related resources.

However, a smaller percentage of respondents stated that they had enough information, with a larger share coming from students in the 3 to 5-year category, suggesting that more extended enrolment contributes to improved knowledge of career services. The smallest proportion of respondents reported having more than enough information, primarily from those who had been at the university for an extended period. This distribution emphasises the need for universities to enhance early communication about career services, ensuring that all students, regardless of their length of enrolment, have adequate support in preparing for their professional careers.

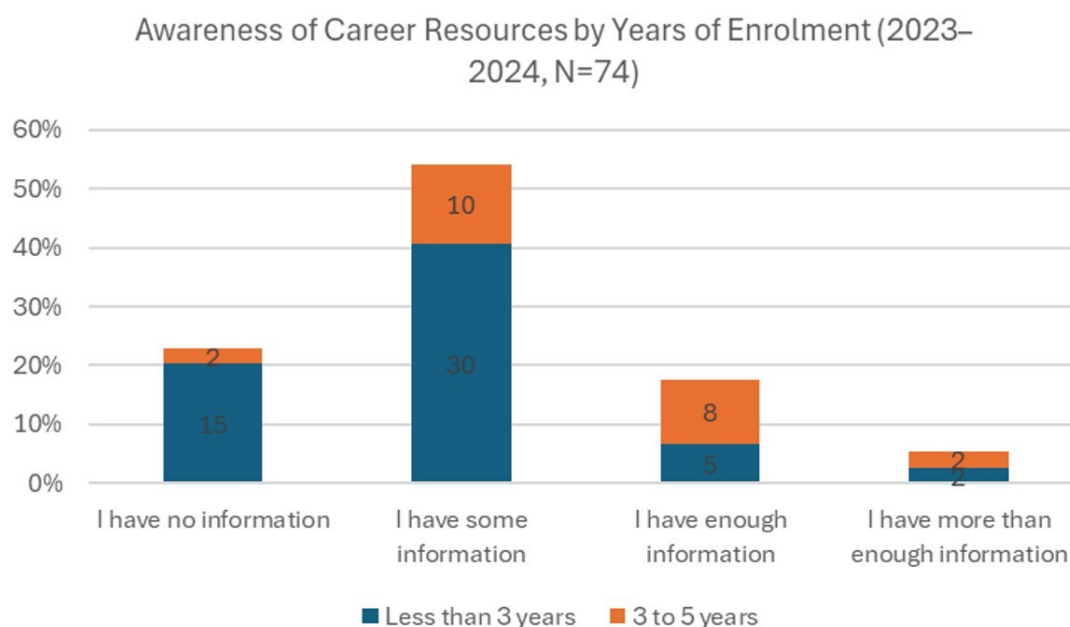


Figure 2. Level of Information on Career Opportunities and Resources Based on Years of Enrolment at ELTE. Source: Elaborated by the authors based on data collected through a questionnaire

To strengthen the interpretation of observed differences in awareness levels, inferential statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS. A Chi-square test of independence was applied to determine whether the level of students' awareness of career development opportunities was significantly associated with the number of years enrolled at ELTE.

The Chi-square test revealed a statistically significant association between years of enrolment and career awareness among international students, $\chi^2(4, N = 74) = 14.81, p = .005$. Students who had been enrolled for three years or more were significantly more likely to report having "enough" or "more than enough" information about career development services compared to those enrolled for fewer than three years. This suggests

that prolonged enrolment may improve familiarity with available career resources, possibly due to increased exposure and informal knowledge networks over time.

Based on the Faculty-Wise Distribution of Career Resource

The survey analysis presents the distribution of student participants across different faculties, assessing their awareness of career opportunities and resources available at the university. The Faculty of Education and Psychology (PPK) had the highest proportion of respondents, with a significant percentage indicating that they had some information, followed by those who lacked information entirely, making it the faculty with the most pronounced variation in awareness. Similarly, the Faculty of Informatics (IK) and the Faculty of Sciences (TTK) also exhibited a substantial share of students with some knowledge of career resources. At the same time, a smaller percentage reported having enough or more than enough information.

Faculties such as the Faculty of Law (AJK), the Faculty of Humanities (BTK), and the Faculty of Economics (GTK) had relatively lower participation rates, with a more balanced distribution of responses across all awareness levels. However, these faculties still reflected gaps in career service awareness, as a notable percentage of students reported having no information. The Faculty of Social Sciences (TATK) exhibited a more even distribution across categories, with a moderate percentage of students having enough or more than enough information. The varying proportion of nominal variation between faculties (the number of outliers in the PPK) is proportional to the variation in the number of respondents.

Overall, the findings suggest that career resource awareness varies significantly across faculties. Some faculties show more uninformed students, while others exhibit greater engagement with career services. These differences indicate the need for faculty-specific approaches to career guidance, ensuring that students across all academic disciplines receive adequate support in preparing for their professional careers.

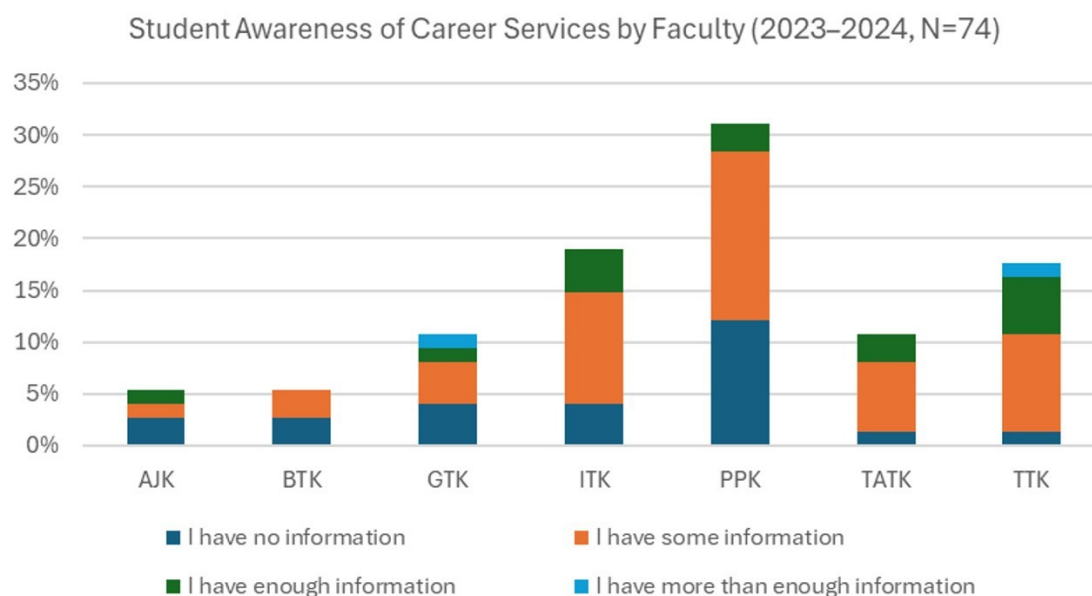


Figure 3. Faculty-Wise Distribution of Career Resource Awareness Among International Students. Source: Elaborated by the authors based on data collected through a questionnaire

To further investigate variation in students' knowledge of career development opportunities, a second chi-square test was conducted to examine whether awareness levels differed across faculties. The same question:

“Do you know in detail the opportunities and resources available at the university to help international students prepare for their careers after graduation?” was cross-tabulated with students’ faculty affiliations.

The chi-square test results showed no significant association between faculty and students’ level of information about career preparation resources, $\chi^2(18, N = 74) = 15.651$, $p = .617$. Similarly, the likelihood ratio ($\chi^2 = 16.792$, $p = .537$) and symmetric measures such as Cramer’s V (.266) and Phi (.460) further confirmed the absence of a meaningful relationship.

Moreover, a large proportion of the cells (85.7%) had expected counts less than 5, violating the assumptions of the chi-square test and further weakening the reliability of this result. Therefore, although there are small descriptive differences in perceived knowledge levels between faculties, these differences are not statistically significant and should be interpreted with caution.

This suggests that students’ awareness of career development opportunities is not significantly influenced by their faculty affiliation but may instead depend more on individual engagement or other contextual factors, such as years of study, as previously found.

Findings of Research Question Two: Frequency of International Students' Participation in Career-Enhancing Extracurricular Activities and Hands-On Learning

This section examines the findings related to the second research question, focusing on how frequently international students engage in extracurricular activities (ECAs) and the impact on how these hands-on learning activities enhance their career development.

International Students' Involvement in Internships and Co-op Programmes

The participants in this study were also asked in the questionnaire how frequently international students engage in career-related extracurricular activities (ECAs), such as internships, career counselling, resume workshops, and immigration assistance programmes. Table 3 presents the findings, revealing low participation rates in these programmes despite their availability. A significant proportion of students reported never or rarely engaging in these activities, with exceptionally high non-participation rates in career counselling (42% never participated), resume workshops (43%), and immigration assistance workshops (45%).

The most commonly attended programmes were orientation sessions and academic advising, with a relatively higher number of students indicating occasional or frequent participation. However, these programmes primarily focus on academic progression rather than career development, indicating a lack of engagement in career-oriented initiatives. Even for internships, crucial for professional experience, participation remains low, with only a tiny percentage of students attending regularly.

Overall, the findings suggest a gap between the career support programmes offered by the university and international students’ engagement in them. While resources are available, low participation rates suggest that better outreach, accessibility, and relevance of these programmes are needed to ensure that international students fully utilise them for their career readiness and post-graduation employment prospects.

	Never	Very Rarely	Rarely	Most of the time	Always
Academic advising	28	8	25	10	3
Orientation programmes	29	12	19	12	2
Career counselling & Fairs	31	15	19	7	2
Internships	25	14	23	9	3
Resume workshops	32	13	19	8	2
Immigration Assistance Workshops	33	8	22	9	2

Table 3. The 74 Study Participants Rating Their Participation in ECA. Source: Elaborated by the authors based on data collected through a questionnaire

Impact of Extracurricular Activities on International Students' Career Readiness

Table 4 reveals that internships, career counselling, and resume-building workshops are among the most beneficial extracurricular activities (ECAs) in equipping international students with practical experience and job market knowledge. Participants were asked to rate the helpfulness of these activities in preparing them for their careers. While many found them moderately helpful, a notable percentage rated them as only slightly beneficial or not helpful at all. The findings indicate that internship programmes have been particularly valuable in providing students with essential knowledge and experience, while resume-building and immigration-related activities have also been supportive. However, despite the availability of career-related ECAs, gaps remain in their accessibility and relevance to all students, emphasising the need for universities to enhance these programmes to ensure their effectiveness in career preparation.

It suggests the need to improve international students' career services, emphasising more structured internship placements, better career counselling sessions, and increased awareness of job-related support programmes. Additionally, the findings underscore the importance of universities fostering more substantial connections with employers to ensure international students can transition successfully from academia to the professional world. This result emphasises the discussion on international student engagement and employability, reinforcing that ECAs play a crucial role in career preparation but require further enhancement and strategic implementation to maximise their impact on student success.

	Not at all Helpful	Slightly Helpful	Moderately Helpful	Very Helpful	Extremely Helpful
Academic advising	26	13	24	9	2
Orientation programmes	25	14	23	12	0
Career counselling & Fairs	22	19	25	7	1
Internships	20	13	25	14	2
Resume workshops	23	11	27	11	2
Immigration Assistance Workshops	25	14	20	13	2

Table 4. The 74 Study Participants Rating the Helpfulness of Participation in ECA at ELTE. Source: Elaborated by the authors based on data collected through a questionnaire

Findings of Research Question Three: Career Aspirations and Post-Graduation Plans of International Students

This section presents the findings related to the third research question, focusing on the future career plans of international students. The analysis explores students' preferred career destinations based on their geographic origin and age group. These two categories were chosen for this analysis to give us the best chance of revealing diverse aspirations based on the patterns of these two categories.

Based on Students' Geographic Origin

Figure 4 presents the findings from the questionnaire, which asked participants about their career aspirations after university graduation. The student's geographical origin separates the findings in Figure 4.

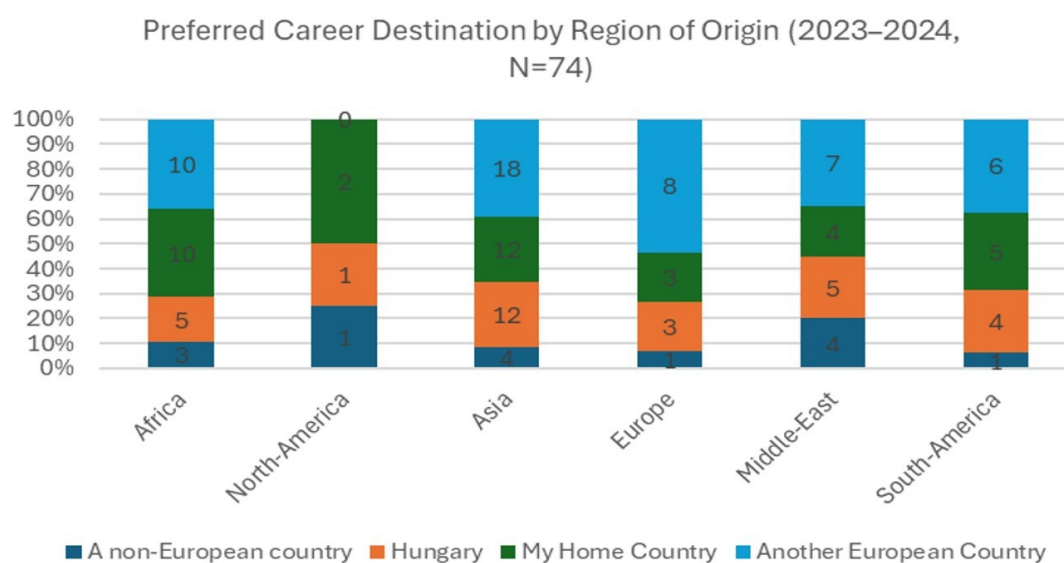


Figure 4. Post-Graduation Career Preferences Based on Students' Geographic Origin. Source: Elaborated by the authors based on data collected through a questionnaire

Students from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East preferred to return to their home countries. However, a significant portion also indicated interest in working in another European country. It suggests that while many students from these regions value career opportunities in their home nations, they also recognise Europe as a viable employment destination.

Participants from North America and Europe displayed a more varied distribution, with some preferring to remain in Hungary, others opting for another European country, and a noticeable share indicating interest in working entirely elsewhere. It reflects a broader global outlook and potential openness to diverse job markets beyond their home region or Hungary.

A considerable proportion of students from South America preferred employment in another European country, followed closely by those intending to return home. Meanwhile, students from the Middle East and Africa showed a stronger inclination toward working in Hungary than students from other regions.

Overall, these findings suggest regional differences in career aspirations, with some groups showing strong ties to their home countries while others prioritise international career mobility. The findings underscore the

importance of tailored career support services at the university to help international students navigate job opportunities both within and beyond Europe.

Based on Age Group

The findings could help us categorise the preferred career destinations after graduation by age group. Figure 5 highlights age-related trends in post-graduation employment aspirations among participants

Students aged 26-35 formed the most significant group across all career destinations, indicating that more experienced students nearing graduation are actively planning their future employment. This age group strongly preferred working in another European country or their home country, with fewer choosing Hungary or other international destinations.

Participants in the 21-25 age group, the second-largest segment, were evenly distributed across all career options, showing a balanced mix between those considering careers in Hungary, another European country, or returning to their home country. It suggests that younger students remain open to multiple career paths, reflecting an exploratory approach to post-graduation opportunities.

A smaller percentage of respondents were under 21 years old, and they were more inclined to seek career opportunities outside their home country, particularly in Hungary or "somewhere else." This result might indicate that younger international students are more likely to pursue global job markets as they gain more academic and professional experience.

The 36-45 age group, representing the smallest proportion, exhibited the least variation in career preferences, though a return to their home country was slightly favoured. Suggesting a stronger career attachment to their home region, possibly due to prior work experience or personal commitments.

Overall, these findings reveal that career aspirations after graduation are strongly influenced by age, with younger students showing greater flexibility. In comparison, older students—especially those in the 26-35 age range exhibit more apparent career intentions. The findings emphasise the importance of age-specific career guidance at universities, ensuring that students at different academic stages receive tailored support in navigating their professional futures.

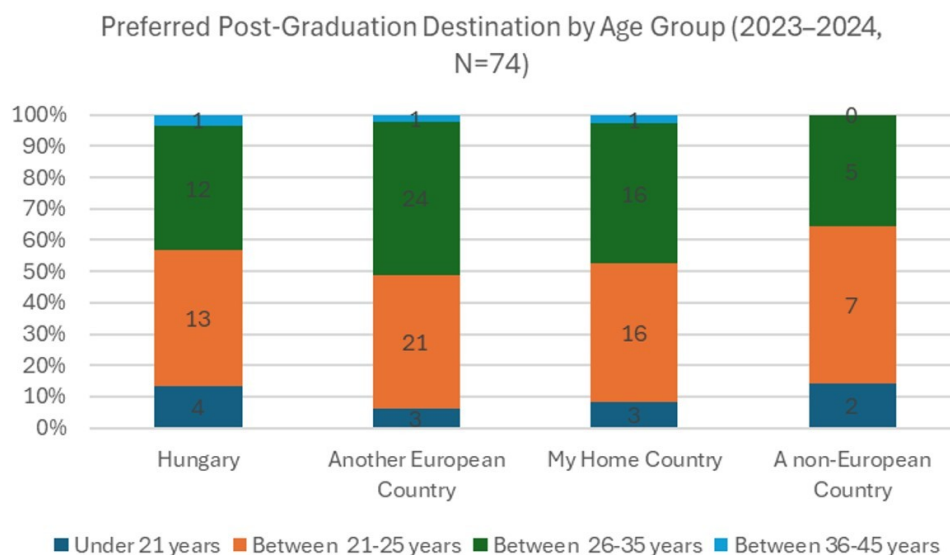


Figure 5. Post-Graduation Career Preferences Based on Age Group. Source: Elaborated by the authors based on data collected through a questionnaire

Discussion

This study examined international students' participation in career-related extracurricular activities (ECAs) and the career support structures available at ELTE. The findings suggest challenges in engagement, accessibility, and inclusivity, emphasising the need for targeted institutional interventions to enhance career readiness. However, due to sample size limitations and survey distribution constraints, the results cannot be generalised beyond ELTE's international student community and should be interpreted with caution.

International Students' Engagement in Career Development Activities

The study reveals low participation rates in key career-focused ECAs, with many students reporting that they rarely or never engage in available programmes such as internships, career counselling, and resume-building workshops. It addresses the second research question regarding engagement frequency and its overall impact.

Key factors contributing to low engagement include limited awareness of existing opportunities and insufficient accessibility of structured career programmes tailored specifically to international students.

These findings align with previous international research, emphasising that international students encounter unique structural barriers in career development, particularly in non-English-speaking environments (Montgomery, 2010; Andrade, 2006). Although ELTE provides various career resources, its reach and effectiveness are compromised by communication gaps, cultural disconnection, and a lack of international student-centred strategies. Similar challenges have been observed in other European contexts, such as Germany and Austria, where international students often report feeling peripheral to mainstream career support initiatives (Leung, 2020; Vincze & Bács. 2020).

The unique international student experience, which includes cultural transition stress, social isolation, and navigation of unfamiliar labour markets, must be at the centre of interpreting these findings. International students face a dual adjustment: academically and professionally, compounding career planning challenges during and after studies.

Career Aspirations and Employment Barriers

Findings related to international students' career aspirations provide further insights into the third research question. While a proportion of students aim to return to their home countries, many express a strong interest in staying in Hungary or relocating elsewhere within Europe after graduation. This result aligns with , who notes that Hungary has become an increasingly attractive post-study destination, particularly for non-EU students seeking European career opportunities.

However, key barriers to successful integration into the labour market include work permit restrictions that limit job opportunities for non-EU students, limited professional networks and insufficient industry collaborations, and language constraints that hinder access to local employment markets.

These challenges are consistent with previous studies on international student employability and career transitions (Tomlinson, 2017). In the Hungarian context, while initiatives such as the Stipendium Hungaricum Alumni Network aim to support international graduates, there remains a gap in targeted university-industry collaboration specifically addressing international students' needs (Dabney-Fekete, 2020).

Institutional Implications

Addressing these challenges requires institutions to go beyond offering generic career support. International students benefit most from programmes that integrate language support, mentorship opportunities, and active collaborations with employers willing to hire graduates from diverse backgrounds. Ultimately, enhancing career-related ECAs for international students demands a holistic approach that connects academic success, career development, and social inclusion strategies within Hungarian higher education institutions.

Conclusion

ELTE hosts a diverse international student population, representing approximately 12.8% of its student body. Although this figure may appear modest, international students contribute significantly to institutional diversity, global knowledge exchange, and academic excellence. However, this study reveals that despite their presence, international students at ELTE face substantial barriers in accessing career development initiatives, participating in governance structures, and transitioning into the Hungarian labour market.

The findings reinforce previous international and Hungarian research (Montgomery, 2010; Pusztai et al, 2016), suggesting that international students often experience a "double disadvantage" when navigating both academic and career landscapes in culturally and linguistically unfamiliar environments. Limited access to structured career services, insufficient industry collaborations, and restrictive legal frameworks disproportionately affect their career trajectories compared to those of domestic students.

Bridging the gap between policy intentions and lived experiences requires a fundamental shift in institutional approaches to career development for international students. Universities, particularly in non-English-speaking contexts, must move beyond offering generic career services and implement targeted reforms, including: expanding English-language career resources, creating structured internships and mentorship programmes tailored to international students' needs, strengthening university-industry collaborations to facilitate job placements, promoting international student participation in governance, and providing comprehensive legal and career counselling that addresses work permit and immigration challenges.

By embracing these strategies, institutions like ELTE can create a more inclusive, supportive environment where international students are not only welcomed but also empowered to thrive academically, professionally, and socially. In doing so, universities can better fulfil their mission of fostering global talent and contribute to the broader European goal of enhancing international graduate employability and integration.

Limitations of the Study

Although this study provides meaningful insights, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The research relied on a sample of 74 international students, which, while sufficient for exploratory analysis, limits the generalizability of findings to the broader international student population at ELTE or other universities. The study is also based on self-reported survey responses, which may be subject to bias and inconsistencies. Additionally, the exclusive use of a quantitative approach, while effective for identifying trends, limits our understanding of students' lived experiences.

Another key limitation of the study lies in the potential for self-selection bias. As participation in the survey was voluntary and distributed through university mailing lists and faculty networks, it is possible that students who are more motivated, engaged, or interested in career-related issues were disproportionately represented in the final sample. It may have influenced the overall pattern of responses, particularly regarding perceptions

of institutional support and levels of extracurricular involvement. Although the sample includes students from diverse backgrounds and faculties, it does not constitute a representative cross-section of ELTE's entire international student population. Future studies may address this limitation by using stratified sampling techniques, targeted recruitment strategies, or collaborations across multiple institutions to enhance the breadth and generalisability of findings.

Future Research Directions

To build on these findings, future studies should adopt a mixed-methods approach, integrate interviews or focus groups to better understand barriers and motivations for participation. Comparative research across multiple universities in Hungary and other European institutions could help identify best practices for fostering international student career development. Institutional analyses incorporating perspectives from faculty, university administrators, and industry professionals would further assess systemic barriers and opportunities for reform. Additionally, exploring the intersection of academic, social, and career dimensions of international student experiences could offer a more holistic understanding of integration challenges. Addressing these research gaps would enable universities to design more evidence-based support structures: policies that support international students academically and professionally, ensuring long-term career success and global employability.

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Nemzetközi hallgatók részvétele karrierfejlesztésre fókuszáló, tanórán kívüli tevékenységekben: Egy magyarországi egyetem esettanulmánya

A tanulmány az Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem (ELTE) nemzetközi hallgatóinak részvételét vizsgálja karrierfejlesztést támogató tanórán kívüli tevékenységekben (extrakurrikuláris aktivitások – EKA). A korábbi kutatások szerint ezek a tevékenységek hozzájárulnak a foglalkoztathatósághoz és a karrierre való felkészüléshez. A nem angol nyelvű országokban tanuló nemzetközi hallgatók azonban gyakran kevésbé ismerik ezen karrierszolgáltatásokat és korlátozottan férnek hozzá a strukturált elhelyezkedési programokhoz. A 74 fős minta eredményei azt mutatják, hogy a hallgatók ritkán vesznek részt szakmai gyakorlatokon, karriertanácsadáson és készségfejlesztő műhelyeken, annak ellenére, hogy ezek elérhetők. Emellett hiányos ismeretekkel rendelkeznek a meglévő karrierforrásokról, ami befolyásolja munkavállalási lehetőségeiket Magyarországon és azon túl. A tanulmány hangsúlyozza a célzott karriertámogatás, az egyetem-ipar együttműködés és a hatékonyabb kommunikáció szükségességét a hallgatók munkaerőpiaci integrációjának javítása érdekében.

Kulcsszavak: nemzetközi hallgatók, karrierfejlesztés, tanórán kívüli tevékenységek, felsőoktatási intézmény, hallgatói részvétel