

Tracing Longitudinal Impact of Professor Lalage Bown: International Master in Adult Education for Social Change

Bonnie Slade, Preeti Dagar

Abstract:

Adult education is recognised globally as a critical element in addressing challenges pertaining to climate justice, migration, employment, education and inequality. This chapter will explore the development, delivery, and impact of the International Master in Adult Education for Social Change (IMAESC n.d.), a European-funded joint master's degree, that can proudly trace its lineage to the work of Prof. Bown at the University of Glasgow. IMAESC is jointly delivered by the Universities of Glasgow, Malta, Maynooth, Tallinn and the Open University of Cyprus. Students complete three mandatory mobility periods and choose between two study tracks 'Community Engagement and Education' or 'Critical Issues, Policy and Curriculum'. Additionally, this two-year programme has a summer school in Malaysia (Universiti Sains Malaysia) focused on sustainability and peace studies. The first cohort of IMAESC students started in 2016 and there have been 118 graduates over the past seven years from over 60 countries. Adult Education takes place in many different sites – Vocational Education and Training (VET) institutions, higher education, community-based, workplace, and political struggle – and our students' experiences reflect that diversity. We examine what impact IMAESC graduates have made nationally and internationally, drawing from an empirical qualitative research project, 'Decolonising Higher Education: A case study of Erasmus Mundus master's programme IMAESC', undertaken in 2021-22. This research included interviews with 19 IMAESC graduates from the Global South. Through critical engagement with theory, policy and action, graduates have contributed to improving their communities, cities, civil society, nations, and international relations.

Keywords: Adult Education for Social Change; Decolonising Curriculum; EU Higher Education; Graduate Impact; Lalage Bown

Introduction: IMAESC Programme Stemming from Lalage's Legacy

Adult education is recognised globally as a critical element in addressing challenges pertaining to climate justice, migration, employment, education, and inequality. This chapter will explore the development, delivery, and impact of the International Master in Adult Education for Social Change (IMAESC),

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a European-funded joint master's degree, that can proudly trace its lineage to the work of Prof. Lalage Bown at the University of Glasgow (Hamilton 2022; Pherali and Buckler 2022). According to Hamilton (2022):

In 1981 Lalage was appointed to the Department of Adult and Continuing Education at the University of Glasgow as Director and titular professor. All of those who had the chance to work with Lalage in Glasgow were privileged in a directly personal way. Under her leadership in the 1980s Glasgow University had the widest subject range of all continuing education departments in the UK, and the 5th highest enrolment figures.

Lalage was inducted into the International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame in 2009 in recognition of her significant contributions to the field. They summarise her approach to adult and continuing education as international, interdisciplinary, and inclusive: «extending to and integrating with economics, ecology, health education, literacy, religious and linguistic traditions. She has shown on many occasions her capacity in planning and participating in the decision-making process, whereby she succeeded in giving adult and continuing education a recognized profile as a major field of education policy in Europe and Africa» (IACE Hall of Fame n.d., paragraph 7).

The International Master in Adult Education for Social Change (IMAESC), an Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Degree programme, was developed out of programmes initiated by Lalage in the 1980s. As is the case with all Erasmus Mundus Master's Degrees¹, it is delivered through a consortium of universities, in this case co-ordinated by the University of Glasgow in collaboration with the University of Malta, Maynooth University, the Open University of Cyprus, Tallin University, and University Sains Malaysia (USM). The consortium has worked collectively since 2014 in designing and running this master's course with a unique focus on Adult Education (AE) for Social Change in a global context. IMAESC is based on the values of equity, justice, human rights, and freedom; these values are integrated within the consortium and throughout the whole student experience. These are some of the morals and ethics that Lalage upheld throughout her life. Building on these values, the programme underscores the political foundations of education and its potential for creating critical thinkers who can work to create societies based on social justice principles. The course engages with and responds to key issues of our time, such as social inequality, migration, intercultural cooperation, employability, and sustainable development.

¹ Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters programmes are distinguished by being offered by multiple institutions over several countries and are promoted by the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) as a benchmark for excellence. They are available to applicants from all countries in the world, and most offer scholarships provided by the EC. The current catalogue shows 193 programmes, and the University of Glasgow has been notable in being involved in 11 of the 33 that have UK partners, and co-ordinating 10 of these (see <https://www.eacea.ec.europa.eu/scholarships/erasmus-mundus-catalogue_en> [2023-07-01]).

A distinctive feature of this programme is the focus on the interconnections between theory and practice, gained through mandatory teaching placements in every mobility. Students undertake three focused credit bearing teaching placements, focused seminars and online courses developed specifically for IMAESC by the Open University of Cyprus, opportunities for three different summer internships, a summer school at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), a world-leader in sustainability and peace studies. There is also an annual research forum in Malta where students across cohorts present their research and interact with alumni. IMAESC specifically addresses the potential of adult education as a tool for genuine sustainable social change. Students emerge with a grounded analysis that allows them to improve their communities, cities, societies, nations, and international relations. The programme reflects the fact that adult education takes place in many different sites – Vocational Education and Training institutions, higher education, community-based, workplace, and political struggle – across the whole of people’s lives, and has been recognised as having the potential to transform societies from the ground up.

This innovative collaborative programme has been funded twice by the European Commission (Erasmus Mundus Joint Master’s Degree) from 2015-20 for 57 scholarships, and from 2018-23 for an additional 79 scholarships. In total we have had EU funding for seven cohorts. The programme has also attracted a significant number of self-funded students. IMAESC has accreditation from the Estonian Adult Educators Association (ANDRAS), the only formal accreditation system for recognising adult educators in Europe. Through an in-depth study of policy, practice, research, and theory, IMAESC aims to offer a coherent programme of in-depth study of adult education for social change, based on the specialised knowledge of the Consortium’s academics, settings, and community partners, using a variety of teaching and assessment methods. IMAESC provides students with ongoing professional development and transferable skills training including the opportunity to acquire key employability skills through credited work placements.

There is strong international interest in the programme. We began the recruitment process in September 2015. For the 2016-18 cohort we had 168 viable scholarship applications (33 from the EU or neighbouring EU countries and 135 international) and we awarded 23 scholarships. The first cohort started in September 2016, consisting of 24 students from 19 countries. For the 2017-19 cohort we received 225 viable scholarship applications (42 from EU or neighbouring EU countries and 183 international) for 19 scholarships. For the 2018-20 cohort we received 349 viable scholarship applications (47 from EU or neighbouring EU countries and 302 international) for 17 scholarships. In the first three years of the programme, we awarded 57 scholarships and attracted 18 self-funded students; the 75 students across the three cohorts were from 35 different countries. Interest continues to grow in the programme and competition increases; for the 2022-24 cohort there were 751 applications for 17 scholarships.

1. Decolonising Higher Education: A Case Study of Erasmus Mundus Master's Programme IMAESC Project Overview

To understand the impact of the IMAESC programme, and better support the graduates in achieving their goal of social justice, we undertook a qualitative research study that analysed the graduates' reflections on the curriculum, pedagogy, and informal learning. The study explored to what extent this critical adult education programme was successful in providing an experience of decolonised higher education, and what challenges were faced by the participants from the Global South. We invited participants from Asia, Africa, and Latin America that had either completed or were enrolled in the IMAESC programme at the time of the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 19 participants: nine from Asia, eight from Latin America, and two from Africa. The interviews were conducted online using Zoom between April and August 2021. Ethical approval was received from the University of Glasgow. All names used in this paper are pseudonyms.

In the next section of the chapter, we present vignettes of four of these students coming from Asia, Africa, South Asia, and Latin America. The stories of these participants showcase the impact of IMAESC students in the world through their contribution to governmental organisational, multilateral institutions, non-governmental organisations and within academia.

1.1 IMAESC Participants' Vignettes

1.1.1 Bauna: Working with a Governmental Organisation

«The title of the programme attracted me», said Bauna, who works with the Ministry of Education in Indonesia. At the time of the interview, she was working on a project regarding disabled learners: «I feel there is more attention paid to these issues there (implying Global North)», speaking from her experience of IMAESC, where she developed an understanding of educational and learning programmes in different countries. She resonated with the theory and philosophy of IMAESC. After starting her work with the Ministry of Education, she worked on a campaign to make people aware of their rights through learning, something she learned in IMAESC through an introduction to Paulo Freire. Bauna also supported the ministry in developing teacher training programmes and digital and non-digital courses. She maintained that IMAESC has profoundly affected her professional life. Adapting to three different countries, working with people from all around the world and accommodating to a new culture every six months resulted in her seeing multiple perspectives for every issue.

Bauna pointed out that IMAESC helped her develop an international network of educators and trainers working towards a common goal of social change. She recalled working on a teacher development programme and contacting her classmates from the Republic of Korea and the United States to understand

how such programmes are designed and operated in those countries. Bauna once attended a workshop where participants shared about formal and informal educational structures in their home countries and how that shapes their way of viewing the world. Bauna completed a placement in the innovation centre of the University of Tallinn, where she designed a website to improve some of their online programmes. Such work experiences and exposure assist her in her current work, and she often reflects on her learning within the classroom of IMAESC courses and her practical experience in the placements.

1.1.2 Nahome: Employed at an International Organisation

Nahome joined the programme from Ethiopia, where he was working as a consultant and trainer with a local organisation. After completing the IMAESC course, Nahome started working with the World Bank in Ethiopia in Human Resource Development. While discussing the programme, he stressed that he learnt much more than academic knowledge and developed different life skills, especially cultural ones. In his words, «my cultural competencies were boosted». He recalled his experiences of working with classmates, lecturers and broader community members in Glasgow, Malta, and Tallinn. Nahome maintained that he got the opportunity for non-formal interaction during this programme through training, presentations, seminars, placement, and other activities, which is not common in his country. He stated that he learned via «meeting people from different geographical areas, different identities, different expertise and interest». Nahome claimed that he established strong ties with community members during his placement in all three countries and developed socio-emotional skills, soft skills and other skills that will help him throughout his life. He particularly enjoyed his placement in Malta, where he worked with migrants and refugees who were entering Malta in hopes of finding asylum in Europe.

Talking about his position in an international organisation, he said that the theoretical and practical aspects of the IMAESC course assist him in designing policies and curricula. The class material and discussions have made him question the social barriers back home. Nahome appreciated the multidisciplinary nature of IMAESC, which made him aware and encouraged him to think deeply about social and cultural issues. He developed an understanding of accommodating the diversity of opinions while designing training programmes and developing theories for human development.

1.1.3 Rajendra: Working with a Non-governmental Organisation

«I started thinking from learner's perspective», Rajendra remarked. The activity has to be productive for the participant, Rajendra added, who was talking about the activities in the local communities of his Himalayan country, Nepal. Rajendra is employed at an NGO where he works with the local community youth groups and women's groups in his country. IMAESC had shifted his perspective about learning from what knowledge the instructor wants to impart to

what learner's wish to learn. Remembering the principles of Jane Vella (2000), which he learnt in the first semester in Glasgow, he explained that the knowledge has to be useful to the participants, so before designing our programmes, we now ask these youth and women's groups about what would be they want to learn – «We discuss issues with the groups and come up with practical solutions or activities». Rajendra believed this change in his perspective is a great achievement he has gained through his IMAESC journey. He asserted that he became more receptive and open to learning and diversity after meeting people from different geographies.

Going out of his country and getting an education in an old, reputed institution was a dream come true for Rajendra. At the beginning of the course, he was anxious that he would be judged for his accent or appearance, and what would happen if he wanted to contribute to the class, but words did not come to him at that time, and the moment passed. Although, some of these issues were resolved when he met his twenty-four classmates from nineteen countries, who all looked different and had different accents. He stressed how IMAESC was a good platform to learn from each other's life experiences within and outside the classrooms. Rajendra stated that all three institutions at Glasgow, Malta, and Tallinn had different sets of teaching and learning practices based on different cultural contexts and settings. In his home country, he had a different learning experience where teachers are seen as repositories of learning, and students sit silently in the class to learn from teachers. Throughout his experience in all three institutions, he moved from teacher-centred to student-centred learning, from «being an object to being a subject». While talking about all of his experiences, he reminded us that he has worked with adults and as part of different NGOs before attending the master's in Adult Education. Therefore, he was reasonably confident that he knew how to work and collaborate with adults. However, he called his learning «a transformation of a lifetime». He described the fond memories of the time in IMAESC with people coming with a similar purpose (of social change) from different backgrounds and bringing all knowledge and experiences of the Globe in a single classroom or forum.

1.1.4 Pedro: Pursuing a PhD

Pedro was appreciative of the scholarship that he received to study IMAESC, and exclaimed, «I would not be able to do a masters in the UK if not for the scholarship». He rated his experience as exceptional both in academic and personal terms. Pedro is pursuing his PhD in Sociology at a university in the UK. His IMAESC degree helped him on his trajectory to pursue a PhD, where he is exploring the role of critical education in his home country context. Pedro talked about his learning at the IMAESC and explored critical pedagogy and sustainable development education. He also mentioned learning more about the theorists such as Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux. Through studying in the IMAESC programme he realised that he had a strong academic inclination: «I really liked research methods and academic writing courses» Pedro stated. In

addition, like many of his classmates, he enjoyed the non-formal and informal part of the course, where he met people from different cultures, races, and religions. Pedro talked about the placement aspect of the IMAESC and pointed out that the practical experience he gained through placement has helped him connect his theoretical knowledge to ground reality. For Pedro, IMAESC was instrumental in developing his interest in social research and enhancing his research skills. Coming from a Global South country with limited financial resources to pursue studies in Global North, Pedro is grateful to have had an opportunity through the Erasmus scholarship to study at some institutions in the UK and Europe.

2. Discussion: The (Emerging) Impact of IMAESC Programme

The testimonies in this paper highlight the importance of learning from different communities, societies, and cultures. The graduates of IMAESC programmes stress that the most valuable learning for them is through connecting with local communities in Glasgow, Malta, Estonia, Ireland, and Malaysia. Most of the students of this course have appreciated the placement aspect of the programme, where they had an opportunity to go to the local communities and neighbourhoods and learn good adult education practices in three different national contexts. Nahome appreciated his experiences working with migrants and asylum seekers in Malta. Student placements in Malta have provided lasting contributions to the community in the form of projects (Foundation for Shelter and Support to Migrants) as well as the CampusFM series of 34 programmes (Malta University Broadcasting n.d.), and video journalism with the African Media Association.

A concern about social inequality and a belief that adult educators can contribute to social change based on smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth is the driving force behind the creation of the IMAESC. Through the framework of the joint Master's degree the programme guarantees the transferability of the curriculum of six different universities. Beyond the university setting, however, certain progressive structures and practices will transfer between sites. The narratives of Bauna and Rajendra demonstrate the application of adult education practices in their work with government and grassroots-level organisations. Students have been involved in campaigns focusing on reproductive rights, in helping with accreditation of an adult education site and in evaluating a migrant integration strategy and programme. We have a growing number of publications from academics in the Consortium and student and graduates themselves. This paper is an example of collaborative work between graduates and IMAESC Consortium members. IMAESC graduates have published monographs based on their dissertation research (Joksimovic 2020) and in leading journals (Sa'ad et al. 2018; Dagar 2019, 2021, 2022; Bogossian 2020; Sonne 2020). Drawing on a conceptualisation of impact as complex and nuanced allows us to begin thinking of the potential impact of the IMAESC programme.

Haggis suggests that in using a complexity perspective in relation to a study of learning in higher education it is necessary to look «across multiple levels and systems simultaneously» (2011, 192). She suggests a «subtly different» approach to cause and effect, which recognises «a relationship between conditions and emergent properties does not attempt to define any of the causalities involved» (2011, 192). It is this not simple to estimate the impact of IMAESC; the global impact of this programme will be felt through the graduates' actions throughout their lives (Haggis 2011; Fox and Slade 2014).

In addition, almost all of the participants of our study have acknowledged that they feel part of a larger global network of adult educators working in different parts of the world and striving towards reducing inequality and creating more equitable societies. IMAESC builds from each learner's interest in adult education to deepen and broaden their knowledge and understanding of adult education in a globalizing world. It is designed for students with diverse prior knowledge and develops their understanding of adult education from an international perspective with a focus on social justice. Students receive a theoretical grounding in adult education, as well as intercultural and practical skills development through work-based learning placements, focused seminars, and online courses. In this way IMAESC is an open learning space, welcoming students from all disciplines – education, engineering, business, and the arts. It is developing future generations of practitioners across a diverse range of professions globally.

Despite austerity policies throughout Europe that are devastating adult education programmes in many member states, the European Commission has provided IMAESC through its Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Degree programme with more than 5 million euros. IMAESC has made an impact in two ways. First, the programme has enabled progressive students from all over the world to connect and work collectively for social change with students and staff in the IMAESC Consortium and broader networks. IMAESC presents a sustainable model that hopefully will have long-lasting effects. IMAESC has built on the existing deep teaching and research connections between the IMAESC Consortium members, and between the partners and the wider adult education community. A high level of cooperation has been established between partners through membership of key international institutions as European Union (EU) and local associations and research networks such as: the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, the European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA), the Institute for International Cooperation of the German AE Association (DVV International), the International Council for AE (ICAE), Asia-Europe Education and Research Hub for Lifelong Learning (ASEM LLL), Place and Social Capital and Learning (PASCAL) International Observatory, Canadian Association for Studies in AE (CASAE), Standing Committee on the University Teaching Research and Education of Adults (SCUTREA) and the University Association for Lifelong Learning (UALL). Much of this connectivity stems for the existence within the co-ordinating organisation, the School of Education of the University of Glasgow of the Centre for Research and Development on Adult Lifelong Learning (CR&DALL). The centre not only has strong relationships with

all of the aforementioned organisation, but also situates the programme within a strong adult education research infrastructure. By engaging with these networks, IMAESC has enabled students, staff, and partners to access and engage in international dialogues through established research networks in the field.

Secondly, the programme has enhanced the profile of adult education within the UK and EU higher education sector, and globally. IMAESC is active in shaping international AE and social change policy and practice. Team members have actively contributed to UNESCO processes, such as the Global Report on Adult Learning and Education, the Futures of Education initiative, CONFINTEA and the development of new programmes by UNESCO institutes. They have also worked with a host of other organisations, including the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the EU and national governments globally.

Since 2016 IMAESC has presented papers at academic conferences (European Society for Research on the Education of Adults Policy Studies 2017; ESREA Research Network on Adult Educators, Trainers and Professional Development 2017, 2019; Comparative Education Society in Europe 2018; International Society for Comparative AE Conference 2017; ESREA Triennial Conference 2019; ESREA Research Network for Adult Educators, Trainers and their Professionalisation 2021; Adult Education in Global Times Conference 2021). IMAESC graduates presented their research at European and International Conferences (Networked Learning Forum 2021; SCUTREALifelong Learning for Inclusion and Sustainability Conference 2022), and students are encouraged to organise, present, and facilitate events that promote IMAESC values. There has been much interest in IMAESC from global social justice networks and we are poised to increase our voice in critical debates on social inequality and AE.

Working collaboratively across national borders and institutional contexts has enabled the IMAESC Consortium to highlight the importance of adult education for social change and help contribute to the work on achieving the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030. Although IMAESC was developed more than two decades after Prof. Bown left the University of Glasgow it is clearly part of her legacy. In 2000, Lalage wrote:

Lifelong education at the end of the twenty-first century will certainly comprise these curricular elements. How they will be delivered and what resources will be available is material for science fiction, but one hopes that any policy context, nationally and internationally, will be based on some underlying principle of social justice (Bown 2000, 350).

Similar to Lalage, IMAESC graduates are driven by an innate desire to contribute towards a just and equitable society. These graduates are making their mark in policy and practice through their work in different parts of the world. In this chapter, we draw on the experiences of four of these graduates, but they are not alone in their fight to create better policies and practices for adult education. With the continuous growth of the IMAESC network, we hope to invite, train, and develop several other practitioners in adult education who will work towards the goal of social justice.

Lalage met several IMAESC graduates in 2018 at the celebration of her 90th birthday in Glasgow. We are proud to trace IMAESC back to the work of Prof. Bown. May IMAESC live long and prosper.

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