



## How Do Erasmus Students Evaluate Their Language Learning Experience Abroad?

Nurdan FIDAN<sup>1</sup> Cigdem KARATEPE<sup>2</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** Study abroad has been exceedingly popular among students, recently. Turkish youth have become even more willing to study abroad and improve their English language skills. As lingua franca (ELF), English is the main Language for interaction, particularly in international education. The current study investigated the language learning perceptions of Turkish students having participated in the Erasmus Exchange Program before. **Research Methods:** The participants were 100 (58 females and 42 males) university students from different departments having been in the Erasmus Exchange Program in the last five years. The data were collected

using two sets of questionnaires containing 41 items and an interview protocol. These aimed to elicit information about participants' views on their English language learning process back then and at the time of data collection and their study abroad experience. Besides, ethics committee approval was obtained for the research on July 3, 2020 (Bursa Uludag University Social and Human Sciences Research and Publication Ethics Committee, 2020-04). **Findings:** The findings indicated that this experience made a lasting impact on them. They have a positive outlook on their language learning experience. They seem to be eager to take part in intercultural communication. In addition, they said that they gained first-hand information on different cultures through the friends they made in Europe, which was an eye-opening experience. Also, students thought that they had improved themselves academically. The participants who are employed at the moment believe that they owe their current position to the qualifications gained abroad. **Implications for Research and Practice:** The study's findings indicated that the participants had developed positive thoughts during their one-semester stay in Europe. A longer study abroad experience might have affected their perceptions differently. They stated that they had not gone through an orientation programme before going to Europe. They all agreed that an awareness-raising orientation program would be a perfect start for any exchange students. For further research, it is advisable to organise a project whereby exchange students receive an orientation programme and are made aware of how to cope with cultural differences before travelling to Europe.

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<sup>1</sup> Corresponding Author, Uludag University, Bursa, Institute of Educational Sciences, Sivas Vocational and Technical Highschool, Sivas, Teacher of English, Turkey, e-mail: nurdan.fidan@outlook.com, ORCID: 0000 0001 8152 3046

<sup>2</sup> Uludag University, Bursa, Turkey, Department of Foreign Language Education, e-mail: cigdem.karatepe@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000 0002 2902 6656

## Introduction

The Erasmus student mobility program has been popular among Turkish university students because it provides students with invaluable experience in many ways. By giving a chance of living in another country, it provides students with an opportunity not only to put their language skills into practice but also to learn about different cultures and lifestyles (Ahn, 2014; Bell, 2016; Cardwell, 2020; Goztas, Ozdemir-Kusku & Topsumer, 2019; Magnan & Back 2007; Paptisibe, 2005).

Since its start in 1987, millions of young people have become mobile within the EU. It was decided at the November 2017 Gothenburg Summit that young people in Europe should be given freedom of mobility for education and work by the year 2025. National borders are no longer the boundaries of young people's dreams to expand their world. It was stated in the report that "a Europe in which learning, studying, and doing research would not be hampered by borders. A continent, where spending time in another Member State - to study, to learn, or to work - has become the standard and where, in addition to one's mother tongue, speaking two other languages has become the norm. A continent in which people have a strong sense of their identity as Europeans, of Europe's cultural heritage and its diversity." (Flash Eurobarometer Brief Report #466, p. 2).

By supporting encouraging co-operation between educational institutions, cross-border mobility will be fostered. In a country where no unjustified obstacles are restricting the free movement of young people's genuine European learning space' will be set up (Flash Eurobarometer Brief Report #466, p. 2).

The benefits of this mobility are numerous. A survey among young Europeans aged between 15 and 30 years shows that a great majority of them (90 %) believe mobility experiences are important. Studying in another country or joining a training program in a foreign country enables youth to gain professional, social, and interactional skills. As a result, this helps them find satisfying employment. The second benefit is cultural awareness. 93% of these students agreed that they had developed a better understanding of the value of other cultures following their study abroad experience. The third benefit is related to the improvement of foreign language skills. 91% of the students reported that they had improved their language proficiency. The final benefit is development in their problem-solving skill, and 80% of them said that thanks to this experience, their problem-solving skills improved (Ibid, p.2).

One of the most attractive aspects of this adventure is that young people were immersed in the host country's culture. Secondly, they made friends with other students from different European countries. Perhaps, for the first time in their life, they need to use English for real reasons, such as registering with the local police in the host country. Studies in the literature reported that the desire to learn a language, improve existing language skills and experience living in a foreign country were the main reasons for students' study abroad (Aslan & Jacobs, 2014; Goztas *et al.*, 2019). These are the most challenging and the most attractive aspects of study abroad.

One would think that all these benefits of the Erasmus Program above would make the study abroad experience a worthwhile and must-have one. Many studies have attempted to find out about the educational outcomes of this program. Some studies argue that students having participated in a study abroad program improve themselves in their academic field (De Keyser, 2007; Gokten & Emil 2019; McLeod & Wainright, 2008; Salisbury, An & Pascarella, 2013). The experiences they gain during their stay can increase their chances to find a good position in the job market, which they could not have dreamed of otherwise (Cardwell, 2020; Di Pietro & Page, 2008).

Engle & Engle (2004) reported that eight factors determine students' happiness levels and the ultimate success of any exchange program. These factors are the duration of the stay, students' existing language competence, required language use in the host country, the institutions' role, academic work, counselling, and orientation both in the students' university and in the host university, situational factors, and student accommodation.

Nevertheless, study abroad is not stress-free. Sigalas (2010) asserted that being an exchange student can be stressful. It presents students with a set of challenges. These can be the new school system, speaking in a language one does not know very well, accommodation problems, adapting to a new diet and a new social environment, which are all stressful for students no matter how well prepared they are (Tekin & Hic-Gencer, 2013). Among these, the factors related to language use seem to be more crucial, as communication problems on top of language problems appear to be the most troubling ones. Camiciottoli (2010) reported that Italian business students found understanding lectures in English exceedingly difficult due to speakers' different accents. Language problems may show variation because students have different levels of language skills. For example, while some may not have any problems communicating in daily life, they may find writing in academic English challenging. Lafford (2004) commented that the learning context has a significant effect on students' use of communication strategies such as self-correction, the self-test of accuracy, and the restructuring of the message. Every student may use them differently. Learners' language beliefs may not change at the same level for all learners because of individual differences such as age, gender, proficiency level and learning style (Hummel-Kirsten 2014).

Most of the previous studies investigated the program's value mainly on daily problems and challenges the students have to deal with (Cardwell, 2020; Jacobone & Moro, 2015). For example, Jacobone & Moro (2015) carried out a study with 505 students studying at Bari University in Italy. Out of 505 students, only 248 of them had participated in the Erasmus mobility programme. The rest of the participants continued their education at Bari University. The participants in both groups were tested twice: at the beginning and end of the Erasmus programme period. Erasmus students were asked to state their reasons for participating in study abroad. The most frequently stated reasons included leisure, cultural appeal, and wish for having new experiences. In addition, academic and professional enhancement were two other

stated motives, though with lower frequency. After completing their study abroad, students were asked which aspect of the programme they most appreciated. A great majority (95%) agreed that they were pleased most because they had a chance to practice their foreign language skills. Almost 75% said that they were happy because they made new friends from different countries.

Similarly, 72% of them appreciated that they had acquired new cultural skills. Almost 70% were pleased to live in a foreign country. A significant number of students (63%) said independence made them happy. Interestingly, professional and academic benefits were at the bottom of the list. That is, only 25% were pleased to have acquired an excellent professional experience, and 38% said that they appreciated that they achieved good academic results.

What makes Jacobone & Moro's (2015) study differ from others is that they also compared and contrasted Erasmus students' data with that of home students. These results of the post data indicated significant differences between groups. For example, the initial language test scores of the students having been abroad and the students having stayed in Italy were equal, as expected. However, by the end of the Erasmus exchange period, the language proficiency test scores of Erasmus students were significantly higher than that of the ones' having stayed in Italy. Moreover, following their return home, an increase in the Erasmus students' intercultural capabilities was recorded. The data also showed a more positive perception of self-efficacy. The analysis also indicated that these students showed higher levels of attachment to European values (Ibid).

The present study aims to investigate whether this study abroad experience helps them become self-directed learners or not. That is, how self-sufficient they feel after this experience. Also, it aims to find out the students' perceptions of their language learning progress.

Based on the literature, it appears that the level of students' happiness at the end of the exchange period seems to depend on many variables. Two important issues are

1. students' academic knowledge and language knowledge, and the quality of the management of the exchange procedure in the host university and
2. the students' host university.

The location of the host university is also a key factor. Some European cities are small, and the people living there are not used to having many foreigners. In addition, it may be the case that ordinary people cannot speak good English. In this case, an exchange student may feel lonely there. By taking such factors into account, the current study aimed to find answers to the following research questions;

1. How do language learners view their language learning progress?
2. Do they have a positive attitude about their experiences in an ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) context?

## Method

### *Research Design*

The present study aimed to describe the opinions of Turkish Erasmus exchange students on their experience. In this sense, it can be referred to as 'descriptive and interpretive' (Friedman, 2012). This study aimed to answer the research questions presented above by using the rich data collected via quantitative and qualitative research tools.

### *Research Sample*

The participants of this study were 100 (58 females and 42 males) Turkish participants having been in an Erasmus Mobility Program in the last five years. Their age ranges from 19 to 30. The participants were accessed via "snowball sampling" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p. 116). At the time of data collection, some of them were students at different universities in Turkey, and some graduated from Turkish universities. None of the participants had any previous study abroad experience, and they lived abroad for only one semester (e.g., approximately 4.5 months). The participants attended 39 various universities in different European countries.

**Table 1**

*Number of Participants According to Their Field of Study*

Departments	Number of participants
Engineering	20
English Literature and Language	14
American Literature and Language	3
Public Relations	5
Teaching	39
Management	4
Architecture	6
Sociology	2
Psychology	2
International Relations	3
Economics	1
Politics	1
Total	100

**Table 2**

*Educational Status of the Participants*

Degree	Frequency	Percent	Valid%	Cumulative%
BA degree	81	81	81	81
MA degree	17	17	17	98

PhD degree	2	2	2	100
Total	100	100	100	

Table 2 shows the educational status of the participants. Eighty-one participants had a Bachelor's degree, and 17 of them had a Master's degree, while 2 of them had a doctoral degree. Moreover, 32 participants work in various sectors presently, while 68 of them are unemployed.

### *Research Instruments*

The data were collected using two sets of questionnaires and an interview protocol. The questionnaires were adapted from Kaypak & Ortactepe's (2014) study (Language Learner Beliefs and Study Abroad: A study on English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)). In the adaptation process only the wording of the items was modified to assist comprehension. The questionnaires contained 41 items in total:

Questionnaire 1 had four parts with 26 items that aimed to gain information on the following issues.

1. Demographic Information,
2. Self-Sufficiency with language skills,
3. Self-Directed Language Learning,
4. Attitudes toward the Role of English in the World.

Questionnaire 2 had 15 items aiming to elicit information on their perceptions of studying abroad. A 5-point Likert scale was used in both questionnaires.

### *Procedure*

This survey aimed to collect data from individuals having participated in the Erasmus mobility program during the last five years. Initially, questionnaires were piloted on 20 students. The pilot study was carried out to calculate the reliability of the questionnaires. Following the pilot study, two items were discarded. Two questionnaires containing 41 items were used in the study. Besides, the items were examined by two experts who were English language teachers. Additionally, ethics committee approval was obtained for the research on July 3, 2020 (Bursa Uludag University Social and Human Sciences Research and Publication Ethics Committee, 2020-04).

The items in Questionnaire 1 were about language learning beliefs, and Questionnaire 2 was about the study abroad perceptions. Both were sent to all participants via Google documents. The data collection process began in March 2018 and lasted until November 2019. Some of the participants (n=13) were interviewed face-to-face by one of the authors, and she recorded these conversations. The participants were asked 11 questions which intended to elicit detailed information on what they thought about their experience, including its contribution to their language skills.

### *Validity and Reliability*

It has been observed that the questionnaire is valid and reliable in the Turkish context, which was previously conducted (Kaypak & Ortactepe, 2014). However, to see the questionnaire's validity in our study group, a pilot study was conducted with 20 university students, and Cronbach's alpha value was calculated as .801. Besides, feedback was requested from these students, and the incomprehensible points were adapted. Moreover, experts were also asked to read and evaluate the questionnaire, and the necessary arrangements were made. Expert opinions were also noted for the interview questions.

### Data Analysis

In total, 100 questionnaires were returned, and the data were uploaded onto the SPSS 22. In addition, 13 students who have previously answered the questionnaire were also interviewed to find out about their perceptions of language learning and studying abroad. Interview questions have been used to support quantitative data analysis.

## Results

The frequencies and descriptive statistics of quantitative data show that students have positive beliefs about studying abroad and language learning. According to the findings of the self-sufficiency, most of the participants thought that they could speak English at a relatively acceptable level ( $M= 4.29$ ). On the other hand, a small part of the participants stated that they could not communicate at the desired level.

Table 3 shows the results of the frequencies and descriptive statistical information. Participants believe that they can communicate with people from different language backgrounds ( $M= 4.32$ ). Besides, they are generally comfortable when they speak in English, as they are not too worried about making mistakes ( $M= 2.24$ ) and believe that their English level is sufficient ( $M= 4.27$ ).

**Table 3**

### *Frequencies and Descriptive Statistics for each Category*

	Strongly Disagree / Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree / Agree	Mean
Self-Sufficiency with Language Skills	17.5%	11.75%	70.75%	3.78
Self-Directed Language Learning	1.75%	3 %	95,25%	4.59
Attitudes Toward the Role of English in the World	4.25%	9.125%	86.62%	4,33
Attitudes Toward Learning English	33.3%	10.9 %	56.4%	3,37
Perceptions of Study Abroad	7.6 %	3 %	89.4%	3,93

*Note.* The table above shows the total frequencies for each category - the Mean (M), which is given below, indicates the central tendency of the answers given by participants; (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neutral, (4) Agree, (5) Strongly Agree.

The second part was about self-directed language learning. The results show that students wanted to use English and put an effort for it outside the classroom (M= 4.69), and they knew that practising English was crucial to enhance their interactive skills (M= 4.80). The third part of the questionnaire was about attitudes toward the role of English in the world. The results indicate that all participants are aware of the role and importance of English as a lingua franca in intercultural communication. They are confident that they can understand different cultures and make friends with people from different cultural backgrounds thanks to their English competency (M= 4.73).

Moreover, participants think that the English language is not owned by one specific culture and country as it is a global language (M= 4.12; M= 4.71). Nevertheless, they also thought that being aware of British or American culture was necessary to sustain a smoothly flowing interaction (M= 3.34). Furthermore, participants thought that most Turkish people should learn English very well to communicate with people from different countries (M= 4.54).

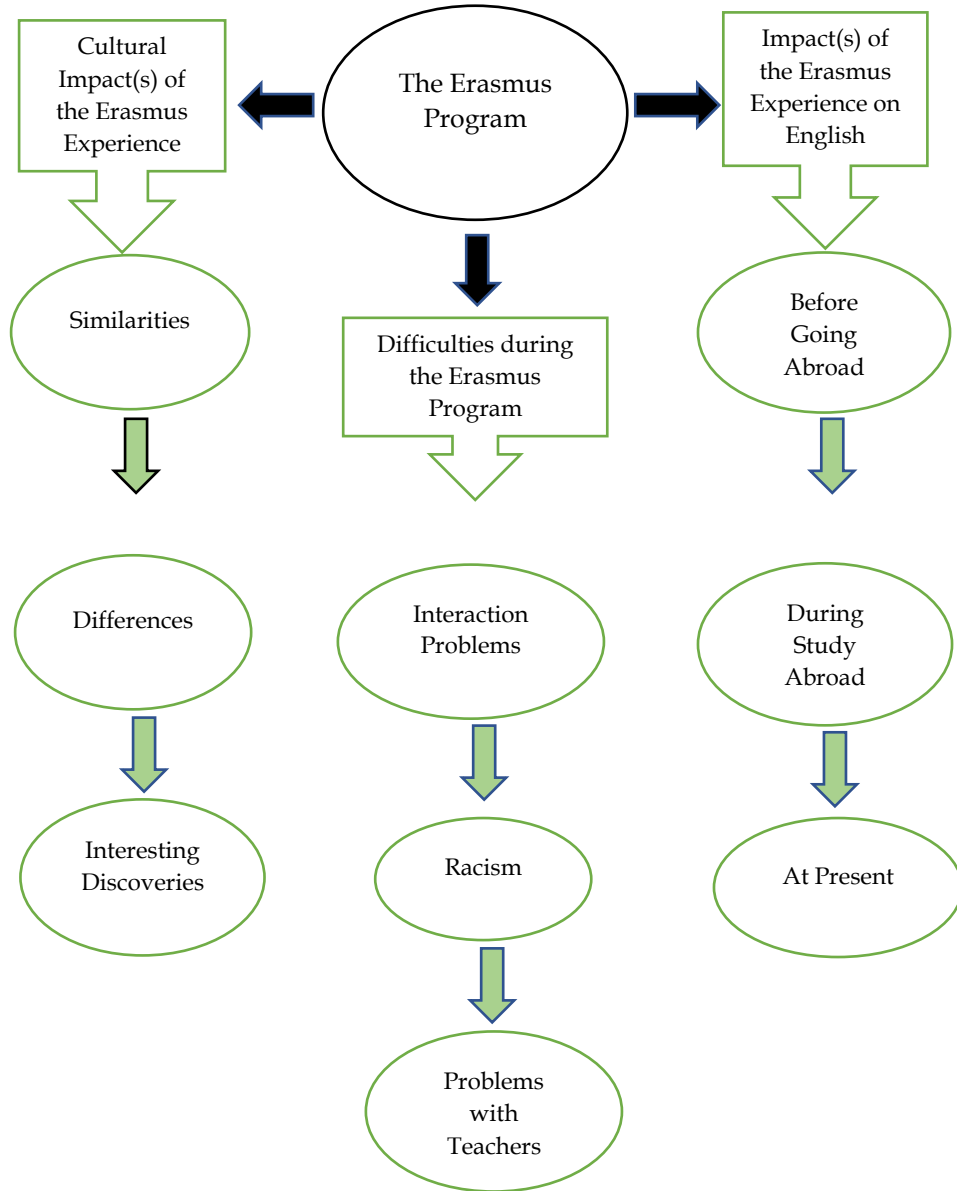
The results of the analysis of Questionnaire 1, which contained items to elicit information on the participants' attitudes toward learning English, showed that they seem to have encountered some difficulties in learning English and worked very hard to improve their language skills (M= 3.93). Nevertheless, it is interesting that some of them did not believe that English was a complex language to learn (M= 2.08). Besides, some participants (n= 12) reported that they did not do any additional study to improve their English (M= 1.56). However, many of them said that they would like to speak English with native speakers (M= 4.43), but they were a bit hesitant because of their accent. They are worried that speaking with a Turkish accent may not be acceptable (M= 2.73). Moreover, they thought that learning English was enjoyable and that they would be glad if they worked in a position that involves speaking English (M= 4.47; M= 4.45).

For the last part, which was about the participants' perceptions of studying abroad, few participants indicated negative opinions. They mostly thought that studying abroad was enjoyable and helpful for them to have a global perspective (M= 4.77; M= 4.67) and for their communication skills since they had improved their language skills during their stay (M= 4.49). What is more, most participants believed that with their new experiences and skills, they would get good grades during the rest of their university education (M= 4.40). Thanks to this experience, they would find an excellent job in the future (M= 4.30).

On the other hand, qualitative data analysis supports the findings above. The semi-structured interview data were audio-recorded. The original data were in Turkish. The data were translated into English by the researchers. It was presented in a paraphrased and a summarised form in English for the readers' convenience. After listening to the audio recordings and transcribing them, themes and related categories were created. The themes emerging from the elicited information were summarised under three



main themes. According to Figure 1, All three main themes are divided into three categories within themselves.



**Figure 1.** Themes and Categories of Qualitative Data Analysis

### *Cultural Impacts of the Erasmus Experience*

There were four questions about the cultural impact of the Erasmus experience. The questions were about the similarities and differences between countries. The answers given were analysed and categorised according to frequently repeated responses.

**Table 4**

#### *The Views of the Students on the Cultural Impact of Their Experience*

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Interview statements</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<b>Similarities</b>	<i>We are all from different nations, we use different languages, and we live in other places, but we have the same food and some cultural events in common (P11).</i>	10
<b>Differences</b>	<i>I did not think that English was spoken by so many local people because I had visited Germany before. However, this time I saw that lots of people were speaking English very well, and they were supportive (P3).</i>	3
	<i>Teachers treated us not as a student but as an individual and there were not many students in the classes so we could speak more often (P2).</i>	5
	<i>But here in Turkey, I know from my university that foreign students come here without knowing anything, and we are not immensely helpful. But I was provided with all the information about transportation, food, the places to visit etc. even before I went to Germany (P10).</i>	7
<b>Interesting Discoveries</b>	<i>This program contributed to my personal development a lot because they gave credence to your opinions and you could spend more time and research something, even in a library, with your teacher and join in the activities out of school. This kind of experience helped me develop myself in many respects (P12).</i>	6

The students were asked whether there was a situation that surprised them in terms of host countries' culture or language, their similarities, and differences as well as the situations they felt good about during this period. Almost all the interviewees highlighted similarities among people from different cultural backgrounds. They often

stated that despite different lifestyles and different languages, they have a lot in common with international students such as food and celebrations.

On the other hand, participants expressed various views about their experiences. Some of them were happy moments thanks to the open-minded peoples' attitudes in the city where they stayed. Others expressed positive opinions about the education system and friendly teachers. Learning about different cultures and making friends from different countries were the two main points they highlighted. All participants agreed that meeting with people from different cultural backgrounds was the most crucial aspect of this experience. Some interviewees mentioned the education system in the host country. They were pleased that the teachers' approach was better in the countries where they were located, and the students had more opportunities to speak English.

However, interviewees generally thought that the most important reason to speak in English was the necessity. Students used English as a common language because of the requirement to meet their needs. Moreover, they seem aware that it is crucial to learn English in an intercultural environment.

Most of the interviewees thought that Turkish universities did not offer events, such as an introductory meeting, or information on the Erasmus program. However, while they were abroad, they participated in many events which helped them adapt to their new environment. It enabled them to get to know different people and to discover their cultures.

#### *Impacts of the Erasmus Experience on English Language Use*

**Table 5**

##### *The Views of the Students on their use of English Language*

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Interview statements</b>	<b>f</b>
<b>Before going abroad</b>	<i>In the lessons in Turkey, I had to learn English because I had to understand English texts, so the English Language was only a tool for me for academic success (P6).</i>	6
<b>During study abroad</b>	<i>You are to use the language when you want to buy something from a market because you do not choose. You are to use what little you know, even at the beginners' level... You are trying to achieve a goal, and you are doing this in a real context (P6).</i>	9
	<i>When you are sick or in a panic, you want to communicate in your mother tongue. Therefore, there were times when I preferred to talk about my troubles with a person from my own country instead of speaking in English. After a while, I got used to speaking in English (P12).</i>	5
<b>At present</b>	<i>I felt this intensely. For instance, I talked with my mother in English, and I was saying some English words to her. Then, I was translating it into Turkish. Because I had gotten used to</i>	13

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<i>talking in English with everybody, I tried to express myself in English. I got used to it after a while (P8).</i>	8
<i>I began to feel more comfortable, and I started to express myself easily. (P12)</i>	

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Interviewees were asked more questions about the impact of this experience on their language use. As shown in Table 5, almost half of the students (n= 6) were aware that they had to learn English before going abroad so that they could understand the lessons and be successful. Nevertheless, they could not improve their English because they did not feel obliged to speak English in Turkey.

On the other hand, most of the students stated that they tried to use English during their stay. The main reason for this is that no different common language is known to communicate. Thus, the students had to speak English. In contrast, some also felt the need to talk to someone from their own country in their mother tongue, as they thought they could understand their comrades better, especially when they felt down. But this did not last long and gradually, they overcame this feeling and switched back to speaking English.

Besides, the students reported that they experienced some language and culture problems after returning to Turkey. All 13 interviewees emphasised that they had gone through a period of the post-Erasmus syndrome. Many of them said they found themselves speaking English with their family members and their friends. They also began to complain about certain behavioural habits in Turkish society. For example, they criticise unruly behaviour in traffic.

Other interviewees reported that they experienced some difficulties in adapting to their new environment as well as communication problems. What is more, one of them was unfortunately robbed, but she still commented that you could not blame the entire nation for this single incident. It is so pleasing that some of the interviewees reported not having one single unpleasant memory. It is evident that all the interviewees (even the interviewees with unpleasant memories) had incredibly positive opinions about the Erasmus program. They all recommended this program to other students, even those subjected to a lecturer's racist treatment. They all thought that both good and bad experiences are helpful for people to learn how to stand on their own feet.

#### *Difficulties during the Erasmus Program*

Table 6

*The Views of the Students on Difficulties They Experienced*

Categories	Interview statements	f
<b>Interaction Problems</b>	<i>Some people did not speak English, and we could not find a common language to communicate. They expected me to learn their language, but I could not. I was only able to learn a few words that I thought might work for me. That is why we couldn't communicate much, and in such situations, I generally preferred to use body language (P9).</i>	6
<b>Racism Problems with teachers</b>	<i>In Poland, unfortunately, some people were racist a little bit. I observed this many times. People looked at us strangely on the train or in the subway because we had a different appearance (P12). Some of the teachers were not good at English or preferred not to speak English. I could not understand most things in the lesson because I did not know their Language (P4).</i>	5 2

The students were asked about the difficulties of the Erasmus Program in the research. In general, interviewees said they had some challenges expressing themselves in English, especially during the first weeks. This may have resulted from the participants' different characteristics and proficiency levels in English. Likewise, their success in interaction also depended on how knowledgeable the people with whom they interacted in the host country were. The students stated that the proportion of English speakers in some countries is high, while it is low in other countries.

In addition, some participants said that they had to learn the native language of the host country, such as Polish, as ordinary people did not know much English. However, some of them said they could not learn the local language even for their basic needs. Due to such difficulties, almost all participants studying abroad had developed some communication strategies. It is evident that nearly all of them used body language, gestures, and mimics as a communication strategy. Some of them also used other techniques such as paraphrasing, simplifying the language, getting help from someone else, drawing etc.

Our interviewees generally said that they were still using these strategies at work and in everyday life. They admitted that they were apparently using their body language more often than before. Since some of the interviewees work as teachers, they reported that they indeed needed such communication strategies, such as simplifying, using body language, drawing, and using single words. Just as they benefitted from them while living in another country, they still find them helpful in facilitating communication. Other interviewees working in various sectors such as banking and business, need to speak in English and use these strategies while communicating with their colleagues, particularly with foreign colleagues and clients. However, they added that their proficiency in English has been more satisfying and that they became more fluent. Thus, they do not have to rely on communication strategies as often as they did before.

Another significant difficulty faced by the students was racism. Unfortunately, 5 out of 13 interviewees said they were exposed to racist treatment (especially in Poland). Moreover, the students also met some people refusing to speak in English as

they expected the Erasmus students to learn their own language (i.e., Polish in Poland). Some students stated that they were excluded because of their appearance, and as for others, it was they did not know the local language.

Lastly, two students expressed that some had difficulties in lessons because some teachers did not speak English. This made the students feel obliged to learn the mother tongue of that country. However, in general, it was seen that other students did not have any problems with their teachers. Moreover, some lecturers were very friendly and helpful.

### **Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations**

The current study aimed to investigate former Erasmus students' beliefs about language learning and their experience of study abroad. The results showed that all the participants had positive thoughts about language learning, and they believed that the study abroad experience had enhanced their language skills. They seem to think that they have gained the necessary intercultural skills. This finding is not consistent with previous studies (Ahn, 2014; Cardwell, 2020; Jacobone & Moro, 2015). All participants seem to be grateful for the opportunity. They all had positive memories as they thought that it had enhanced their language skills and given them a renewed understanding of learning English and a eye-opening familiarity with different cultures. Sivis-Cetinkaya (2013) reported a link between students' gratitude as a psychological strength with subjective well-being. Since being an Erasmus exchange student is such a desirable thing, any student feels immense gratitude for this achievement. The second author of this study has been the Erasmus co-ordinator in her department, and she has observed this kind of appreciation in her exchange students for years.

Even though they encountered some problems during their stay in the EU such as interaction problems because of their unsatisfying level of language, lack of communicational skills, high level of anxiety about making mistakes, they reported considerable progress. Besides, some of them had to learn the languages of the countries where they studied. As a result, they gradually improved their speaking and expression skills within the process. What is more, they have enjoyed being in a foreign country, making friends from other countries and learning about different cultures.

They thought that student exchange experience was beneficial for improving language skills and expanding their world view due to exposure to foreign languages and cultures (Ahn, 2014). These findings overlapped with that of Engberg & Jourian's study (2015), stating that studying abroad enhanced learners' cross-cultural awareness. Like our results, Allen & Herron (2008) also reported a behavioural change toward native speakers and an improvement in students' linguistic achievement as in our study. Our students were also disposed to learn other cultures without prejudice, and they had developed global perspectives.

The sufficiency of language skills plays a vital role in terms of not only academic success but also the overall well-being of international students during their study abroad. Can, Poyrazli and Pillay (2021) described eleven issues challenging international students studying in the USA in their detailed analysis of the factors influencing international students. The first and the most foremost vital factor is their level of English language. The proficiency level of a student affects his/her interaction with both local people and lecturers and fellow students at the university. Accordingly, English language proficiency is a key factor determining students' overall happiness and success.

Furthermore, when our informants were asked about their memories, they all tended to remember the good ones first and recommended this program to everyone. They also thought that this experience was crucial for getting a good job, and some of them said that they found the right positions thanks to the proficiency they had gained from intercultural experiences. On this basis, it seems that study abroad was amply beneficial for students' future life.

On the other hand, our participants had positive beliefs about their study abroad experience, as seen in the previous studies (Asoodar, Atai & Baten, 2017; Engle & Engle, 2004; Jackson, 2008; Kaypak & Ortactepe, 2014; Watson, Siska & Wolfel, 2013; Watson & Wolfel, 2015). Moreover, Ingraham & Peterson's (2004) survey was conducted in the U.S.A (Michigan State University), and they found that their students were able to adapt to other cultures (M= 4.41). Similarly, our students were eager to share their own culture with others and they wanted to learn about other cultures. According to the results of the current study, the means of questions about culture were higher than 4.

In terms of participants' self-sufficiency with language skills, even though some Turkish participants did not appear confident with their language skills or at ease with making mistakes (questions 2 and 4), they still had positive perceptions about their English level (Means were higher than 4) as they were aware of their progress (Amuzie & Winke, 2009; Di Silvio, Diao & Donoan, 2016). The participants thought that they had gained important skills and developed their language level.

In terms of the participants' attitudes toward learning English in the current survey, they indicated positive beliefs about language learning. Kaypak, & Ortactepe (2014) revealed similar results in their study. Likewise, Pinar (2016) found out that students gain the linguistic advantage while studying abroad. Other studies (Allen & Herron, 2008; Engberg & Jourian, 2015; Isabelli, 2004; Kang 2014) also showed that studying abroad helped students improve their four language skills and related sub-skills. Moreover, in the current study, it appears that our participants have developed a self-directed stance toward language learning. They seem more aware that learning English is essential to communicate with someone around the world and for their future job positions. They thought that this experience was crucial for getting a good job, and some of them said that they found the right positions thanks to the proficiency

gained from intercultural experiences. On this basis, it seems that study abroad was greatly beneficial for students' future life.

Contrary to Onen's study (2017) findings, preparing documents and recognition of the courses were not considered as problems by these students. The differences between the education systems were referred to as crucial aspects of Onen's study (2017). Nonetheless, some of the findings of this study showed that such different practices in host countries were highly regarded issues, from which Turkish institutions need to learn something. Adaptation to Turkey and the way of life in Turkey and unintentional switching to speaking in English were problems for most participants.

When students can interact with people in their social and academic contexts, they are ready to deal with other issues, which will widen their horizon so that they can accommodate different lifestyles and traditions (Ahn, 2014). These findings overlapped with that of Engberg & Jourian's study (2015), revealing that studying abroad enhanced learners' cross-cultural awareness. Similar to our findings, Allen & Herron (2008) also reported a behavioural change toward native speakers and an improvement in students' linguistic achievement as in our study. Our students were also disposed to learn other cultures without any prejudice, and they had developed global perspectives. The interview data revealed that some of the participants highlighted similarities between Turkish culture and their host culture. This can be regarded as a good sign indicating that the exchange programme reached its chief aim to eliminate cultural barriers for the sake of fostering intercultural communication.

Even though some Turkish participants did not appear confident with their language skills or at ease with making mistakes (questions 2 and 4), they still had positive perceptions about their English level (means were higher than 4) as they were aware of their progress (Amuzie & Winke, 2009; Di Silvio *et al.*, 2016). Our participants thought that they had gained important skills and developed their language level.

The findings indicate that they have developed positive perceptions of language learning. This experience has made a considerable impact on them. They gained first-hand information on different cultures through other exchange students. Most employed participants believe that they owe their present jobs to the qualifications gained during the Erasmus experience.

The participants in this study had not experienced studying abroad before, and they had been abroad only for one semester. If they had encountered longer than one-semester of study abroad, it might have affected the overall results and our interpretation of the data. Another line of study may investigate the possible benefits of an awareness-raising orientation program with an intercultural element. In the light of such information, researchers may focus on the duration and an awareness-raising orientation program for further researches.

**Note:** An earlier version of this study was presented at the 5<sup>th</sup> Asoscongress, International Symposium on Educational Sciences, Istanbul Yildiz Technical University, 25<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> October 2018, Istanbul, Turkey.



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### Erasmus Öğrencileri Yurt Dışında Dil Öğrenme Deneyimlerini Nasıl Değerlendiriyor?

#### Atf:

- Fidan, N., & Karatepe, Ç. (2021). How do erasmus students evaluate their language learning experience abroad? *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 93, 51-72 DOI: 10.14689/ejer.2021.93.3

#### Özet

*Problem Durumu:* İngilizcenin ortak dil olarak kullanılması sebebiyle, birçok insan İngilizce öğrenme ve Avrupa'da okuma konusunda çok daha meraklı hale geldi. Bu da birçok öğrenciyi Erasmus programlarına katılmaya teşvik etti ve öğrenciler arasında bu program son zamanlarda oldukça popüler hale geldi. Erasmus programı ile yurt dışında okuyan öğrenciler İngilizce dil bilgisi, akademik beceriler, farklı kültürlerle açık olma, genel dünya görüşüne sahip olma, iletişim becerileri gibi pek çok açıdan gelişim gösterebileceği gibi; yeni bir ortamda bulunma, farklı dillere ve kültürlerle maruz kalma, yeni arkadaşlar ve çevre edinme deneyimi, kişiden kişiye farklılık gösterebilecek olan dil yeterliliği ve iletişim becerileri sebebiyle bazı sorunlarla da karşı karşıya kalabilmektedirler. Öğrenciler üzerinde Erasmus programının olumlu ya da olumsuz etkilerinin oluşabilmesi; yurt dışında kalma süreleri, buldukları ülke, bu ülkedeki insanların tutumları, yeni kültürlerle ve insanlara adapte olabilmelerinin hızları, iletişim becerileri, dünya görüşleri gibi pek çok sebepten etkilenmektedir. Öğrencilerin yurt dışında okuma eğilimi göz önüne alınarak, bu çalışmada Erasmus değişim öğrencisi olarak yurt dışında okumuş üniversite öğrencilerinin dil öğrenme algıları incelenmiştir.

*Araştırmanın Amacı:* Bu araştırmanın amacı Erasmus programının öğrencilere öz yönetimli olma konusunda fayda sağlayıp sağlamadığını, yani kendilerini dil öğrenimi ve iletişim konusunda ne kadar yeterli hissettiklerini ve bu program

sonrasında öğrencilerin dil öğrenme algılarının değişip değişmediğini incelemektir. Bu doğrultuda, çalışma aşağıdaki sorulara cevap aramıştır:

1. Dil öğrenenler dil öğrenme süreçlerini nasıl değerlendirmektedirler?
2. Öğrenciler ortak dil bağlamında İngilizce öğrenimi hakkında pozitif düşüncelere sahip midir?

*Araştırma Yöntemi:* Katılımcılar son 5 yılda Erasmus değişim programına katılmış 100 (58 kadın ve 42 erkek) öğrencidir. Bu öğrenciler Türkiye'deki farklı üniversitelerden ve farklı bölümlerdedir (Mühendislik, Öğretmenlik, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı, Amerikan Dili ve Edebiyatı, Uluslararası İlişkiler, Ekonomi, Psikoloji, Mimarlık, Halkla İlişkiler, İşletme, Sosyoloji, Siyaset Bilimi). Veri toplamda 41 madde içeren iki adet anket aracılığı ve bir yüz yüze görüşme protokolü aracılığı ile toplanmıştır. Bu araçlar katılımcıların yurt dışına çıkmadan önce, yurt dışındayken ve hali hazırda kendi İngilizce öğrenme süreçleri ile ilgili geliştirmiş oldukları görüşleri ve yurt dışındaki eğitim deneyimleri hakkında bilgi toplamaktadır. Veriler 'Google Formlar' aracılığıyla toplanmıştır ve veri analizinde SPSS programından yararlanılmıştır. 20 adet anket pilot çalışma için önceden analiz edildikten sonra, öğrencilerin algılarını ölçebilmek adına 100 anket için tanımlayıcı analizler (Descriptive-Precriptive) yapılmıştır. Ayrıca, araştırma için Bursa Uludağ Üniversitesi Sosyal ve Beşerî Bilimler Araştırma ve Yayın Etik Kurulu'ndan (2020-04) 3 Temmuz 2020'de onay belgesi alınmıştır.

*Araştırma Bulguları:* Bulgular yurt dışında okuma tecrübesinin katılımcıların üzerinde anlamlı bir etki bıraktığını göstermektedir. Katılımcılar yabancı dil öğrenme ve kültürler arası iletişim kurma konusunda olumlu algılar geliştirmiştir. Ayrıca katılımcılar bu fırsatı elde edebildikleri, yeni bir dünya görüşüne sahip olabildikleri, farklı kültürleri anlamada kendilerini geliştirebildikleri ve dil becerilerini artırdıkları için minnettar kalmışlardır. Öğrenciler bunlarla birlikte akademik olarak kendilerini geliştirdiklerini de düşünmektedirler.

İletişim becerisi eksikliği, dil yeterliliğinin eksik olması, yanlış yapma korkusu sebepleriyle başlangıçtaki iletişim problemlerine rağmen, öğrenciler zaman içinde bunları aştıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Bazıları aynı zamanda buldukları ülkenin dilini de iletişimde bulunmak için öğrenmek zorunda kalmış ve iletişim becerilerini geliştirmiştir. Dahası, öğrenciler farklı ülkede bulunmaktan, farklı kültürleri birbirleriyle paylaşmaktan ve bu kültürlerden arkadaş edinmekten oldukça memnun kalmıştır. Öğrenciler yurt dışı deneyimleri sayesinde kültürlerarası bir farkındalık kazandıklarını belirtmiştir. Farklı kültürlerden arkadaşları sayesinde farklı kültürler hakkında bilgi edinmiş olmaları da onların ufkunu açmıştır.

Bir başka açıdan, halen çalışmakta olan katılımcılar buldukları işi yurt dışında edindikleri becerilere borçlu olduklarına inanmaktadır. Hali hazırda çalışmayan katılımcılar ise, kazandıkları beceriler sayesinde iyi işler bulabileceklerini düşünmektedirler.

Öğrenciler olumlu kazanımlarıyla birlikte bazı zorluklarla da karşı karşıya kalmışlardır. Bunların başında ise ırkçılık sorunu gelmektedir. Bazı öğrenciler buldukları ülkedeki insanlar tarafından zaman zaman olumsuz tutumlara maruz

kalsa da öğrencilere yurt dışı deneyimleri ile ilgili anıları sorulduğunda, hepsinin pozitif anıları hatırlamaya meyilli oldukları görülmüştür.

Öğrencilerin dil yeterliliği bakımından, bazı öğrenciler kendilerini ifade etme ve yanlış yapma konusunda her ne kadar rahat olmasa da kendi gelişimlerinin farkında oldukları için dil becerileri konusunda olumlu algıları bulunmaktadır. Öğrencilerin dil öğrenme ile ilgili tutumlarına bakıldığında, öğrenciler yurt dışı tecrübeleri sayesinde dili sürekli kullanmak durumunda kaldıkları ve insanlarla iletişim halinde oldukları için dört ana dil becerilerini (yazma, okuma, dinleme, konuşma) ve bunların alt becerilerini (telaffuz, dil bilgisi, kelime vb.) geliştirdiklerini belirtmişlerdir.

Bu bulgulara ek olarak, öğrenciler Erasmus programı bitiminde Türkiye'ye döndüklerinde bazı adaptasyon zorluklarıyla karşılaştıklarını rapor etmişlerdir. Bunların başında ise Türkiye'deki yaşam tarzı ve insanların olaylara karşı tutumları (karşıdan karşıya geçme ve insanların birbiriyle iletişim tarzı gibi) ile öğrencilerin zaman zaman Türkçe yerine bilinçsiz olarak İngilizce konuşmaları gelmektedir.

*Araştırma Sonuçları ve Önerileri:* Öğrenciler yurt dışında kaldıkları süre boyunca birtakım olumsuz olaylarla da karşılaşmalarına rağmen, oldukça olumlu düşüncelerle geri dönmüş ve kazandıkları becerileri halihazırda kullanmalarıyla birlikte, ileride de kullanmaya devam edeceklerini belirtmişlerdir. Bununla birlikte, öğrenciler yurt dışında sadece bir dönem kalmışlardır ve hiçbirinin daha önce bir yurt dışı deneyimi bulunmamaktadır. Bundan sonra yapılacak çalışmalarda, öğrencilerin daha uzun süre yurt dışında tecrübe edinmiş olmaları ve daha önce yurt dışı tecrübelerinin bulunması değişkenleri de göz önüne alınabilir ve sonuçlar kıyaslanabilir. Aynı zamanda, bir farkındalık yaratma oryantasyon programı da öğrencilerin düşüncelerinde ve algılarında farklılık yaratabileceğinden göz önünde bulundurulabilir.

*Anahtar Kavramlar:* Erasmus programı, kültürlerarası iletişim, yurt dışında okumak, yabancı dil olarak İngilizce.