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**DOKUZ EYLÜL ÜNİVERSİTESİ**  
**EĞİTİM BİLİMLERİ ENSTİTÜSÜ**



**DOKUZ EYLÜL UNIVERSITY**  
**INSTITUTE OF EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES**  
**DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES EDUCATION**  
**PROGRAMME OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION**  
**M.A. THESIS**

**INVESTIGATION ON THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF ERASMUS  
EXCHANGE PROGRAM TO TURKISH PROSPECTIVE EFL  
TEACHERS AND THE PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED DURING  
THE PROCESS**

**Ayperi SAL İLHAN**

**İzmir**  
**2021**

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**2021**

## ETİK İLKE VE KURALLARA UYGUNLUK BEYANNAMESİ

Yüksek lisans tezi olarak sunduğum “Investigation on the Contributions of Erasmus Exchange Program to Turkish Prospective EFL Teachers and the Problems Encountered During the Process” adlı çalışmanın içerdiği fikri izinsiz başka bir yerden almadığımı; çalışmamın hazırlık, veri toplama, analiz ve bilgilerin sunumu olmak üzere tüm aşamalarında ve bölümlerinin yazımında bilimsel etik ilke ve kurallara uygun davrandığımı, tez yazım kurallarına uygun olarak hazırlanan bu çalışmada kullanılan her türlü kaynağa eksiksiz atıf yaptığımı ve bu kaynaklara kaynakçada yer verdiğimi, ayrıca bu çalışmanın Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi tarafından kullanılan bilimsel intihal tespit programıyla tarandığını ve *intihal içermediğini* beyan ederim. Herhangi bir zamanda aksinin ortaya çıkması durumunda her türlü yasal sonuca razı olduğumu bildiririm.

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Ayperi/SAL İLHAN



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**Tez Başlığı:**

Investigation on the Contributions of Erasmus Exchange Program to Turkish Prospective EFL Teachers and the Problems Encountered During the Process

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DEU	: Dokuz Eylül University
EC	: European Commission
ECHE	: The Erasmus Charter for Higher Education
ECTS	: European Credits Transfer System
ELT	: English Language Teaching
EFL	: English Foreign Language
EHEA	: European Higher Education Area
EP	: European Parliament
ESN	: Erasmus Student Network
EUC	: Erasmus University Charter
EU	: European Union
F	: Frequency
HEI	: Higher Education Institution
ICT	: Information and Communication Technologies
ISM	: International Student Mobility
KMO	: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin
LLP	: Lifelong Learning Programme
QUAL	: Qualitative
QUAN	: Quantitative
SA	: Study Abroad
SALA	: Study Abroad and Language Acquisition
SMS	: Erasmus Student Mobility for studies
SPSS	: Statistical Package for Social Sciences

## ÖZET

### ERASMUS DEĞİŞİM PROGRAMININ TÜRK İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRETMEN ADAYLARINA KATKILARININ VE PROGRAM SÜRECİNDE KARŞILAŞILAN PROBLEMLERİN İNCELENMESİ

Günümüzün küreselleşen dünyasında eğitimin dinamikleri her gün değişmektedir. Bloom'un (2008) belirttiği gibi, başarılı bir küreselleşme aşamasında eğitim önemli bir rol almaktadırlar. Uluslararası öğrenci hareketliliği ve yurt dışı eğitim programları İngilizce öğretmeni adaylarının gelişiminde büyük bir etkiye sahip olabilir. Özellikle Avrupa'da 1987'de başlayan ve Türkiye'nin 2004'te katıldığı Erasmus değişim programının yaygınlaşmasıyla birlikte, Türk öğrenciler için yurt dışı eğitim tecrübesi edinmek daha kolay hale gelmiştir.

Bu çalışmanın amacı, Türk İngilizce öğretmen adaylarının Erasmus değişim programının akademik, dil, sosyal, kültürel, kişisel ve kariyer gelişimlerine katkıları hakkındaki görüşlerini; ve Erasmus öncesinde, sırasında, sonrasında karşılaştıkları problemleri araştırmaktır. Bu çalışma ölçüt örneklem yöntemi ile belirlenen 37 İngilizce öğretmen adayının katılımıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Bu çalışmada karma yöntem kullanılmıştır. Önen (2017) tarafından hazırlanan çevrimiçi anket ve yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme yoluyla nitel ve nicel veriler toplanmıştır. Likert ölçeği, çoktan seçmeli ve derece sıralama sorularından oluşan anketin ikinci bölümü nicel olarak analiz edilerek frekans ve yüzdeler hesaplanmıştır. Yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmelerin içerik analizi için nitel veri analiz programı MAXQDA 2020 kullanılmıştır.

Sonuçlar, katılımcıların Erasmus programından özellikle kişisel ve kültürel gelişim açısından yararlandığına inandıklarını ortaya koymuştur. Dil gelişimleri daha çok konuşma becerileri ve akıcılık konusunda gerçekleşmiştir. Aynı zamanda katılımcıların Erasmus sürecinde birçok problem yaşadıkları saptanmıştır. Katılımcılar, Erasmus öncesinde daha fazla problem yaşadıklarını belirtmiştir. Erasmus öncesinde yaşanan temel problemler bilgi eksikliği ve evrak işlerinden kaynaklanırken, Erasmus sırasında genellikle akademik ve finansal problemler yaşanmıştır. Bazı katılımcılar Erasmus hareketliliği sonrasında günlük hayatlarına adapte olmakta zorluk çektiklerini belirtmiştir. Elde edilen bulgular ışığında kurumlara, gelecekte programa katılmayı düşünen öğrencilere ve ileriki araştırmalar için önerilerde bulunulmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Erasmus değişim programı, uluslararası öğrenci hareketliliği, İngilizce öğretmeni adayları, katkılar, problemler.

## ABSTRACT

### INVESTIGATION ON THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF ERASMUS EXCHANGE PROGRAM TO TURKISH PROSPECTIVE EFL TEACHERS AND THE PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED DURING THE PROCESS

In today's globalized world, the dynamics of education is changing each day. As Bloom (2008) states, the education plays a vital role in the successful globalization progress. International student mobility and study abroad programs can have a great impact on the development of prospective EFL teachers. Especially with the prevalence of the Erasmus exchange program, which was launched in 1987 in Europe and in which Turkey participated in 2004, it became easier for Turkish students to have study abroad experience.

The primary goal of this study was to investigate the perceptions of Turkish prospective EFL teachers regarding the contributions of Erasmus exchange program to their academic, language, social, cultural, personal, and career development as well as the problems that they encountered before, during and after the Erasmus mobility. The study was carried out with the participation of 37 Turkish prospective EFL teachers who were selected through criterion sampling method. The mixed methods design was adopted in the study. Data were collected by means of an online survey developed by Önen (2017) and semi-structured interview. The second part of the survey, which consisted of Likert-scale, multiple choice, and rank-order scale questions, was analysed quantitatively in terms of frequencies and percentages. For the content analysis of the semi-structured interviews, a qualitative analysis software called MAXQDA 2020 was used.

Results revealed that the participants believed they benefited from the Erasmus program mostly in terms of personal and cultural development. Their language development was mainly related to speaking skills and fluency. It was also found that participants encountered many problems in the Erasmus process. They believed that "pre-Erasmus" was the most problematic process. While the lack of information and paper work were the main problems encountered before the Erasmus, "during the Erasmus process" mainly academic and financial problems were encountered. Some participants experienced "the post-Erasmus syndrome" after the Erasmus mobility. In the light of these findings, suggestions for institutions, future exchange students and further research were presented.

**Keywords:** Erasmus exchange program, international student mobility, prospective EFL teachers, contributions, problems.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Introduction

The first chapter of the study presents a background information about the research including the purpose of the study, significance of the study, statement of the problem and the research questions. Finally, the assumptions and limitations of the study are presented.

### 1.2. Background of the Study

Together with the advances in the science and technology, the life in the 21st century has changed considerably. As Osterhammel & Peterson (2005, p.3) suggest, “the world is becoming noticeably smaller as distant lands are being linked ever more closely together”. Although there is not a universally accepted definition of the globalisation, various definitions were proposed by some researchers. In today’s globalized world, the dynamics of education also have changed. Consequently, the education at all levels has been a vital component of the successful globalization progress (Bloom, 2008). The teachers, who are described as the communicator, educator, evaluator, an educated human being and the agent of socialization by Fillmore & Snow (2000) have an important role at this point. In order for teachers to take on these functions, they need to adapt themselves according to the needs of the 21st century and help the students become more autonomous and self-confident learners. Especially EFL teachers, who introduce a new language and a new way of communication to the students should continuously develop themselves and broaden their own perspectives before they can expand their students’ horizons. Teacher training is the first step to achieve an education of high quality and there are many ways that the prospective EFL teachers can develop themselves during their university education. International student mobility can be a medium for achieving this goal.

As a result of globalization, international mobility has become an integral part of higher education policy. Teichler (2015) presents four distinctions of international student



mobility and puts an emphasis on the distinction between horizontal and vertical mobility. The vertical mobility is degree purpose mobility. That is, the students study in another country until they graduate and get a degree. On the other hand, horizontal mobility is a short-term mobility, which means there is no continuing education until graduation, and the goal is not to achieve a degree. The students study abroad for one semester and take a few courses in a short-term mobility. Temporary horizontal mobility has gained popularity in Europe recently.

During the 1970s, higher education became part of the European agenda and promotion of student mobility gained importance. As a result, the Joint-Study Programmes (JSP) were established in 1976 and remained active for about a decade until the inauguration of the Erasmus program in 1987. Soon after its beginning, the Erasmus program was perceived as “the flagship of the educational programs” administered by the European Union (Bracht et al., 2006). The program encompasses student mobility, teacher/staff mobility, joint curriculum development, and intensive teaching programs (Puigpelat, 1989; Martin, 1990). It was seen that international student mobility become a normal option for university students instead of a marginal phenomenon thanks to the Erasmus program.

In general terms, the main goal of the Erasmus program is to improve the quality of higher education by promoting inter-country cooperation between European universities, recognizing students’ degrees academically and contributing to the development of transparency. (European Commission, 2012). For the benefit of the whole, the Erasmus program is trying to fulfill its aims through offering good practices in European countries, helping the students gain new skills, increasing employment opportunities, improving language skills, and enhancing personal development. It is also aimed to raise individuals who are equipped with high quality higher education services in Europe and who respond more to the expectations of the business World in Europe.

Turkey participated into Bologna Process in 2001, and Turkish National Agency was founded in 2002. With the aim of implementing the Erasmus Program for all participants, International Offices were structured within the body of Turkish universities in the same year. Two years later, in 2004, Turkey has joined the Erasmus program. In the 2004-2005 academic year, 1.142 students participated in the Erasmus program and this number increased to 8.759 in the 2009-2010 academic year (Ülgür, 2011). Di Pietro & Page (2008, p.396) states that “the number of applicants is higher than the number of places available, universities have to set up selection processes that are based on past student

performance". However, as for Turkey, the statistics show that the number of the students who have benefited from the program recently is relatively low even though there are available places. Therefore, the Erasmus program, especially in Turkey, deserves more attention.

Being able to function under different circumstances have become an important aspect in the teacher training process as suggested by Ünlü (2015). The review of the related literature clearly shows that studying abroad in the framework of the Erasmus program for at least one semester brings about noteworthy contributions to the development of the participants in various aspects. In spite of its possible contributions, the Erasmus mobility is a demanding process during which the participants may have difficulties. Since this process requires completely unfamiliar tasks to carry out, the participants may have various problems throughout the process. Majority of the studies on Erasmus program were carried out with the university students from different departments (Cantez, 2020; Çepni et al., 2018, Jacobone & Moro, 2015; Kohn, 2015; Özmen, 2019; Papatsiba, 2005; Raikou & Karalis, 2010). On the other hand, only a small body of research focused specifically on the Erasmus experience of Turkish prospective EFL teachers (Aydın, 2012; Caner, 2019; Çiftçi, 2016; İter, 2013; Kızılaslan, 2010; Önen, 2017; Yıldırım & İlin, 2013). Aydın (2012) states that the perceptions of the participants regarding the potential contributions during the mobility process are a remarkable issue to evaluate the program in the sense of the efficiency, outcomes, and impacts of the process.

Considering the issues mentioned above, it can be seen that there is need for obtaining more information on the Erasmus exchange program, especially in ELT context. In order to close the gap in the literature, the current study aims to investigate the contributions of Erasmus exchange program to Turkish prospective EFL teachers' academic, language, social, cultural, personal and career development. Also, the problems encountered by the participants before, during and after the Erasmus process were examined. Investigating the Erasmus experiences of Turkish prospective EFL teachers through real-life examples may encourage more students to participate in the program and enable the Erasmus coordinators to sufficiently guide the Erasmus students. Finally, the findings of the study might raise awareness on the problems encountered in the Erasmus process to minimise the problems and maximise the contributions of the program.

### **1.3. The Purpose of the Study**

The primary goal of this study is to investigate whether and to what extent participants believe the Erasmus program contributed to their academic, language, social, cultural, personal, and career development. It is also aimed to investigate whether participants encountered any problems, and if they did, which period (before, during, or after) of the Erasmus programme was more problematic for them.

### **1.4. The Significance of the Study**

Together with the changing roles in the teaching profession, the process of teacher training has also experienced changes (Ünlü, 2015). Hence, the prospective teachers should be skilled at preparing themselves to meet the demands of the globalized world. Especially for EFL teachers, who are responsible for introducing not only a new language but also new ways of communication, interaction, cultural patterns, and perspectives, this skill gains more importance. In the framework of the Erasmus exchange program, Turkish prospective EFL teachers may have the opportunity to go beyond their limits and gain a cross-cultural experience. However, the related literature shows that only a small body of research focused specifically on the Erasmus experience of Turkish prospective EFL teachers (Aydın, 2012; Caner, 2019; Çiftçi, 2016; İltel, 2013; Kızılaslan, 2010; Önen, 2017; Yıldırım & İlin, 2013). By providing more insight into the Erasmus experiences of Turkish prospective EFL teachers, this study may help the students be prepared for the process by illuminating the contributions and the drawbacks of the Erasmus program. Also, the study may encourage more participation in the Erasmus program.

Finally, this study is also expected to be useful for departmental and institutional Erasmus coordinators. They may raise awareness of the challenges students encounter throughout the program. Thereby, according to the needs of the students, the coordinators can better guide the candidate Erasmus students.

### **1.5. Statement of the Problem**

The goal of this study is to investigate whether studying abroad in the framework of the Erasmus exchange program for at least one semester has any contributions to Turkish prospective EFL teachers' academic, language, social, cultural, personal, and career development. It is also aimed to determine the problems that they encounter before, during, and after the Erasmus process.

### **1.6. Research Questions**

The primary goal of this study is to investigate the perceptions and reflections of Turkish prospective EFL teachers on the contributions of the Erasmus exchange program and the problems they encountered during the process. Therefore, nine research questions were addressed as follows:

- 1) To what extent does Erasmus exchange program contribute to prospective EFL teachers' development in various fields?
- 2) What are the contributions of Erasmus exchange program to prospective EFL teachers' academic development?
- 3) What are the contributions of Erasmus exchange program to prospective EFL teachers' language development?
- 4) What are the contributions of Erasmus exchange program to prospective EFL teachers' social development?
- 5) What are the contributions of Erasmus exchange program to prospective EFL teachers' cultural development?
- 6) What are the contributions of Erasmus exchange program to prospective EFL teachers' personal development?
- 7) What are the contributions of Erasmus exchange program to prospective EFL teachers' career development?
- 8) Do prospective EFL teachers encounter any problems during the Erasmus process?
- 9) In which period (before, during, or after the Erasmus) do prospective EFL teachers have the most problems?
- 10) What type of problems do prospective EFL teachers encounter in each period of the Erasmus process?

In order to find answers to these questions, both qualitative and quantitative research methods are used. The data is collected through semi-structured interviews and an online survey which consists of three parts including demographics, and open and closed-ended questions that yield information through Likert-scale, multiple choice and rank-order scale. The first and second parts of the survey are analysed quantitatively. The data collected through the open-ended questions and the semi-structured interviews are examined through content analysis.

### **1.7. Assumptions of the Study**

1. It is assumed that the survey and the semi-structured interview are suitable data collection tools to determine the contribution of Erasmus exchange program to Turkish prospective EFL teachers and the problems encountered during the process.
2. The sample chosen for the study was assumed to have the ability to represent the universe.
3. It is assumed that the participants give sincere answers to the questions presented to them in the survey and during the interviews.

### **1.8. Limitations of the Study**

The current study which investigates the contributions of Erasmus exchange program to Turkish prospective EFL teachers and the problems encountered during the process has several limitations as listed below:

1. The study is limited to 37 Turkish prospective EFL teachers studying at Dokuz Eylül University. It cannot be generalised to all Turkish prospective EFL teachers.
2. When participants' characteristics are taken into consideration the results of the study cannot be generalised to prospective EFL teachers from different counties.
3. Although the triangulation design model was adopted, the data collection tools used in the study are limited to the online survey developed by Önen (2017) and the semi-structured interview.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1. Introduction

The scope of this chapter is to review the literature with regard to the international student mobility with a focus on the Erasmus program and its impact on various contexts, especially in English Language Teaching (ELT). The following topics are discussed: Globalization in higher education, international student mobility, the Erasmus exchange program, the aims of the Erasmus program, studies on the Erasmus program, and studies with Turkish prospective EFL teachers.

#### 2.2. Globalization in Higher Education

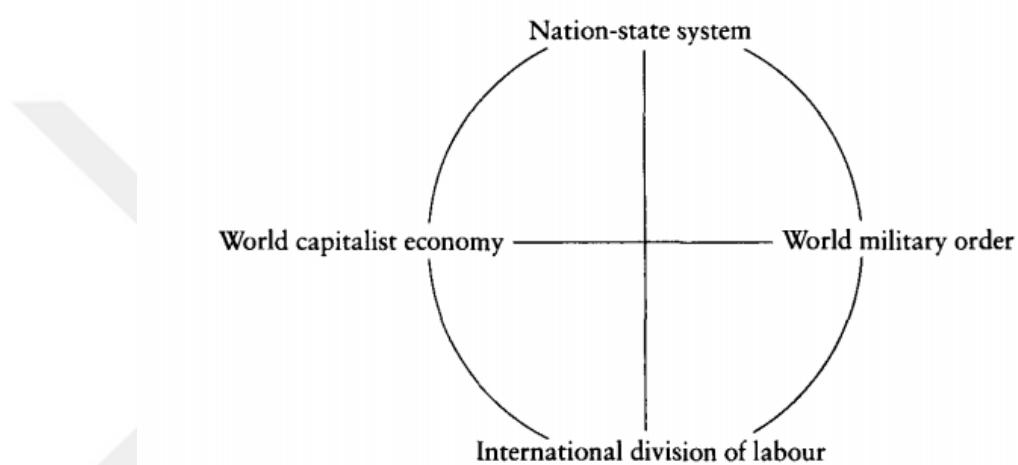
Together with the globalization, it has become easier for the people from different countries to come together and exchange goods, services, ideas, and information. The societies go beyond their borders and their interdependence increases day by day. As Osterhammel & Peterson (2005, p.3) suggest, “the world is becoming noticeably smaller as distant lands are being linked ever more closely together”. Consequently, the people’s thoughts are moving from the national level to the international level (Balay, 2004). Although the effects of globalisation have become significantly crucial for the world, it does not have a universally accepted definition. It is a historical and social phenomenon that has been defined and interpreted through different perspectives over the years. Various definitions of globalisation by some researchers are illustrated in Table 1:

Table 1

*Definition of 'Globalisation'*

Researchers	Definition
Giddens (1990, p.64)	“the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.”
Spich (1995, pp. 10-11)	“a mind set, an idea set, an ideal visualization, a popular metaphor and, finally, a stylized way of thinking about complex international developments.”
Laïdi (2002, p. 69 as cited in Al-Rodhan & Stoudmann, 2006, p.16)	“a process of intensifying social relations on a worldwide scale that results in an increasing disjunction between space and time.”
Szeman (2003, p. 94 as cited in Al-Rodhan & Stoudmann, 2006, p.17)	“the moment of mass migration, multiculturalism, and cosmopolitanism.”
Spich (1995, pp. 10-11.)	“a mind set, an idea set, an ideal visualization, a popular metaphor and, finally, a stylized way of thinking about complex international developments.”
Al-Rodhan & Stoudmann (2006, p.5)	“a process that encompasses the causes, course, and consequences of transnational and transcultural integration of human and non-human activities”
Maringe & Foskett (2012, p.27 as cited in Kohn, 2015, p.9)	“the creation of the world relations based on the operation of free-markets”

These examples show that the definition of globalization varies based on some dimensions. For instance, Giddens (1990) proposed a four-fold classification of the globalisation (Figure 1) and evaluated the term based on four dimensions: Nation-state system, international division of labour, world capitalist economy, and world military order. He further explained that although these were connected in various ways, neither could be explained in terms of the other.



*Figure 1.* The dimensions of globalisation (Giddens, 1990, p.71)

According to Kehm (2003, p.100 as cited in Çağlar-Erdoğan, p.11), “internationalisation is wider than europeanisation but not as wide as globalisation; because borders continue to exist and with these also inclusions and exclusions”. Teichler (2004b, p.6) argues that terms which end with “-sation” usually signal that “there was a problem in the past and an opportunity for improvement.” In this sense, globalisation is a good example for his assertion. In today’s globalized world, together with the advances in science and technology, also the dynamics of education change direction. Consequently, the education at all levels has been a vital component of the successful globalization progress (Bloom, 2008) and higher education has become the most crucial target of globalization (Kohn, 2015). International student mobility plays an important role in the globalization process of higher education institutions.



### 2.3. International Student Mobility

The development of an individual's skills can be achieved mainly through education and universities are the best places for this. With the aim of educating students and enriching their worldview, universities have established more connections with the world and adopted "borderless education approach" as a key strategy (Kohn, 2015, p.15). As Ward (2015) states, internationalisation is one of the main goals of higher education institutions. Consequently, international mobility has become an integral part of higher education policy. In order to foster global engagement, the comprehensive internationalization model was proposed by American Council on Education (ACE). Comprehensive internationalization is defined as a strategic and coordinated framework that integrates policies, programs, initiatives, and individuals to make colleges and universities more globally oriented and internationally connected. As can be seen in Figure 2, there are six dimensions involved in this approach and student mobility is an important component of these internationalization strategies.



*Figure 2.* American Council on Education (ACE) Model for Comprehensive Internationalization (Ward, 2015, p. 10)

With the intention of understanding the character and possible impact of student mobility, Teichler (2015, p.16) presents four distinctions made as a result of in-depth analyses:

1. “Foreign students” and “study abroad” versus student mobility;
2. Temporary mobility (occasionally called “credit mobility”) versus mobility for the whole degree programme (occasionally called “degree mobility”);
3. “Horizontal” versus “vertical” mobility;
4. Inward versus outward mobility

Among the four distinctions of student mobility, Teichler (2015) puts and emphasis on the third distinction, horizontal and vertical student mobility. He claims that it is an important distinction that will never show up in official statistics and further explains the terms as follows:

“In the former case, students move from an academically and often economically less favourable country or institution, to a more favourable country and institution. This is based on the hope that the quality of one’s competences will be substantially enhanced by such a leap upwards, and adaptation to the host country and institution is the imperative. In the latter case, students are mobile between countries and institutions of a similar academic level: learning from valuable contrasts is the aim, rather than a leap upwards.” (Teichler, 2015, p.17)

Temporary horizontal mobility has gained popularity in Europe, especially together with the Erasmus exchange program, which is viewed as promoting ‘horizontal mobility’ (Teichler, 2004a). Learning the value of diversity in another country is claimed to be achieved through horizontal mobility rather than vertical mobility. The Sorbonne Declaration in 1998 and the Bologna Process in 1999 played crucial roles in creating a new higher education system by increasing the objectives of the universities. It was aimed to train students within the framework of certain quality and qualifications, to serve economic growth and development. (The Council of Higher Education, 2010).

The main goal of the Sorbonne Declaration in 1998 was to increase student mobility in Europe by reforming and modernizing the European higher education system. As a continuation of this reform, in 1999, the Bologna Declaration was signed by 29 European countries (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland,

Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom). International organizations such as the European Commission, the European council and university associations, rectors, and European students participated in this process (European Commission, 2010). Their common aim was to achieve an integrated and harmonised academic degree and quality standards. Figure 3 illustrates the development of Bologna Proces from Sorbonne to Yerevan (1998-2015) in a detailed way.

<b>Mobility of students and teachers</b>	Mobility also for researchers and administrative staff	Social dimension of mobility	Portability of loans and grants	Attention to visa and work permits	Attention also to pension systems and recognition	Benchmark of 20 % by 2020 for student mobility	Explore path to automatic recognition of academic qualifications	Implementation of key commitments
<b>A common two-cycle degree system</b>	Easily readable and comparable degrees	Fair recognition Development of joint degrees	Inclusion of doctoral level as third cycle	QF-EHEA adopted National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) launched	NQFs by 2010	NQFs by 2012	Roadmaps for countries without NQF	Implementation of key commitments
		<b>Social dimension</b>	Equal access	Reinforcement of the social dimension	Commitment to national action plans	National targets for the social dimension to be measured by 2020	Widening access and completion rates	Social inclusion
		<b>Lifelong learning (LLL)</b>	Alignment of national LLL policies Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)	Flexible learning paths	Partnerships to improve employability	LLL as a public responsibility Focus on employability	Enhance employability, LLL and entrepreneurial skills through cooperation with employers	Employability
<b>Use of credits</b>	A system of credits (ECTS)	ECTS and Diploma Supplement (DS)	ECTS for credit accumulation		Coherent use of tools and recognition practices	Implementation of Bologna tools	Ensure that Bologna tools are based on learning outcomes	Adoption of ECTS Users Guide
	<b>European cooperation in quality assurance (QA)</b>	Cooperation between QA and recognition professionals	QA at institutional, national and European level	European Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance (ESG) adopted	Creation of the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR)	Quality as an overarching focus for EHEA	Allow EQAR registered agencies to perform their activities across the EHEA	Adoption of revised ESG and European Approach to QA of joint programmes
<b>Europe of Knowledge</b>	European dimensions in higher education	Attractiveness of the EHEA	Links between higher education and research areas	International cooperation on the basis of values and sustainable development	Strategy to improve the global dimension of the Bologna Process adopted	Enhance global policy dialogue through Bologna Policy Fora	Evaluate implementation of 2007 global dimension strategy	
								<b>Learning and Teaching:</b> Relevance and quality
1998	1999	2001	2003	2005	2007	2009	2012	2015
Sorbonne Declaration	Bologna Declaration	Prague Communiqué	Berlin Communiqué	Bergen Communiqué	London Communiqué	Leuven/ Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué	Bucharest Communiqué	Yerevan Communiqué

Figure 3. The Bologna Process: from Sorbonne to Yerevan, 1998-2015  
(European Commission, 2018, p.18)

#### **2.4. The Erasmus Exchange Program**

The name of the Erasmus program comes from the abbreviation of its official name (EuROpean Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students). In addition, this abbreviation refers to Dutch Desiderius Erasmus (1465-1536) who was the writer, greatest scholar of the northern Renaissance and the figure of the early humanist movement. As the most prominent educational scientist in the early 16th century, he studied classical literature and Latin in Paris, where he was introduced to Renaissance humanism. During his life time, he had a chance to travel to many parts of Europe, including France, Germany, Italy and Switzerland. He met some of the most brilliant thinkers of Europe. As an independent and intellectual scholar, Erasmus reflected his humanist desires on his works and encouraged a better morality, and greater understanding between people. Moreover, by criticizing strict administrations, he was an advocate of innovations, and especially an education system based on humanism. When the nature and aims of the program is considered, “Erasmus” seem to be the most compatible name for a student exchange program that enables the university students and faculty members to spend a period of time in European countries, develop themselves in their academic fields, and get to know the cultures of European countries more closely.

During the 1970s, higher education became part of the European agenda and promotion of student mobility gained importance. As a result, the Joint-Study Programmes (JSP) were established in 1976 and remained active for about a decade until the inauguration of the Erasmus program in 1987. Soon after its beginning, the Erasmus program was perceived as “the flagship of the educational programmes” administered by the European Union (Bracht et al., 2006). It was seen that the program helped international student mobility become a normal option for university students instead of a marginal phenomenon.

Turkey participated into Bologna Process in 2001, and Turkish National Agency was founded in 2002. With the aim of implementing the Erasmus Program for all participants, International Offices were structured within the body of Turkish universities in the same year. Two years later, in 2004, Turkey has joined the Erasmus program and 65 Turkish universities received The Erasmus Charter for Higher Education (ECHE). Together with the foundation of new universities, 190 Turkish universities are holding ECHE today (Seyhan-Çağlar, 2019). Table 2 exhibits the chronological flow of the Erasmus program with more details.

Table 2

*The chronological development of the Erasmus program*

<b>17th June 1987</b>	Erasmus programme launched with first exchange of just over 3 000 students between 11 Member States (Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, France, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and United Kingdom).
<b>1988</b>	Luxembourg joins Erasmus.
<b>1992</b>	Six European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries join the programme (Austria, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Switzerland).
<b>1994</b>	Liechtenstein joins Erasmus.
<b>1997</b>	Erasmus teacher exchanges introduced.
<b>1998</b>	Six Central and Eastern European countries join the programme (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia).
<b>1999</b>	Six Central and Eastern European countries join the programme (Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Slovenia).
<b>2000</b>	Malta joins Erasmus.
<b>2002</b>	Celebration of the One Millionth Erasmus student.
<b>2003</b>	Erasmus University Charter introduced.
<b>2004</b>	Turkey joins Erasmus.
<b>2007</b>	Start of the Lifelong Learning Programme with new actions introduced to Erasmus, such as student traineeships and staff training.
<b>2009</b>	Celebration of the Two Millionth Erasmus student and Croatia joins the programme.
<b>2009/2010</b>	3000 higher education institutions send students and staff abroad.
<b>2011</b>	Switzerland rejoins the programme (33 countries now take part in Erasmus).
<b>2012/2013</b>	Three Millionth Erasmus student expected.
<b>2014</b>	Launch of new Erasmus for All programme.

**Source:** European Commission, 2012, pp. 6-8.

Erasmus Program Guide (2020) provides some information on the implementation of the procedure as below:

- For Erasmus exchanges, there must be a valid Bilateral Agreement signed between the home university and the host university. Also, both parties must have Erasmus University Charter (EUC).
- In order to participate in the Erasmus program, the students must be a full-time university student at any of the formal education levels. Furthermore, the selection criterion is mainly based on past school performance and foreign language competence. That's why, grand point average of the students must be at least 2.0 / 4 or 70/100. In addition, they need to pass foreign language exams organized by their institutions.
- If the conditions stated above are met, they can also benefit from the Erasmus grant.
- The financial support provided by the National Agency is not requested back. However, the Erasmus grant is not intended to cover all expenses of the students. The purpose of financial support is to assist in additional expenses during the mobility. While 80% of the grant is paid during the mobility period, 20% is paid after successfully completing the program.
- Finally, the students who decide to participate in the Erasmus program must contact with the Erasmus coordinators at their universities and follow their directions.
- The Learning Agreement must be signed by all parties before the Erasmus study mobility period begins.

Di Pietro and Page (2008,p. 396) proposed that “the number of applicants is higher than the number of places available, universities have to set up selection processes that are based on past student performance”. According to his statement, the students who have good academic records have higher chances to be selected than their peers who have poor academic records. In the 2004-2005 academic year, when the Erasmus program started in Turkey, 1.142 students participated in the Erasmus program and this number increased to 8.759 in the 2009-2010 academic year (Ülgür, 2011). With a special focus on Dokuz Eylül University, Table 3 presents the number of outgoing and incoming Erasmus students between 2003-2018. It can be seen from the table that there have been a gradual decrease in the number of outgoing and incoming Erasmus students after the academic year of 2013-2014.

Table 3

*The numbers of outgoing and incoming Erasmus students at Dokuz Eylül University between 2003-2018*

<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>Outgoing Students</b>	<b>Incoming Students</b>
2003 - 2004	7	-
2004 - 2005	36	13
2005 - 2006	69	23
2006 - 2007	75	32
2007 - 2008	104	45
2008 - 2009	91	62
2009 - 2010	144	62
2010 - 2011	164	74
2011 - 2012	210	93
2012 - 2013	326	115
2013 - 2014	343	145
2014 - 2015	196	158
2015 - 2016	259	131
2016 - 2017	270	69
2017 - 2018	282	41
<b>Total</b>	<b>2.576</b>	<b>1.063</b>

**Source:** DEU International Relations Office (2021)

In line with the statistics illustrated above, the related literature shows that the number of the students who have benefited from the program recently is relatively low in spite of available places. In this respect, it can be suggested that the Erasmus program, especially in Turkey, deserves more attention and it is crucial to encourage the students to participate in the program.

## 2.5. The Aims of the Erasmus Program

According to the agreement of the National Agency in 2014, the target audience of the Erasmus program is as follows:

- Institutions / organizations active in education, youth and sports
- Students who continue their education in higher education institutions
- Academic and administrative staff of universities
- Associations, foundations, non-governmental organizations

In the current study, however, the main focus is on the the students who continue their education in higher education institutions. As for the objectives of the Erasmus program in this context, prior to presenting its aims, it might be a good start point to review what the Erasmus program is not about as listed by the International Relations Office of DEU (2021):

- The Erasmus Program is not a “foreign language learning programme”.
- The Erasmus Program is not exactly a “scholarship” programme.
- The Erasmus Program is not a “diploma” programme.
- The Erasmus Program is not a “research” programme.

Then, what are the aims of this program? In general terms, the Erasmus program aims to improve the quality of higher education by promoting inter-country cooperation between European universities, recognizing students’ degrees academically and contributing to the development of transparency. (European Commission, 2012). For the benefit of the whole, the Erasmus program is trying to fulfill its aims through offering good practices in European countries, helping the students gain new skills, increasing employment opportunities, improving language skills, and enhancing personal development. It is also aimed to raise individuals who are equipped with high quality higher education services in Europe and who respond more to the expectations of the business World in Europe. To sum up, the general aims of the Erasmus program can be summarised as removing boundaries, fostering new ideas, promoting synergy across different fields of education, training and youth, and raising individuals who respect the differences by gaining European Citizen Identity.



## 2.6. Studies on the Erasmus Program

The review of the related literature shows that there is a growing body of research on the Erasmus program and the phenomenon has been evaluated through various focal points. In earlier studies, the Erasmus program was evaluated based on the participants' motivations, expectations and satisfaction levels as well as the contributions of the program (Papatsiba, 2005; Sigalas, 2010a; Şahin, 2007; Teichler & Janson, 2007; Yağcı et al., 2007). Teichler (2001) addressed the effects and consequences of studying abroad and claimed that the Erasmus students benefit from international job opportunities more easily compared to the non-Erasmus students. Moreover, the Erasmus experience was reported to have positive effects on the academic, cultural, personal, and linguistic development of the participants as well as on their first job applications. The fact that the Erasmus program has potential contributions to the participants' development in many fields makes the issue an appealing research area. The contributions of participating in the Erasmus program and the problems encountered in the process have been handled with various focus of areas in the literature. Some examples for these studies are presented below.

There are several studies evidencing that the Erasmus program has positive impact on the academic development of the participants (Aslan & Jacobs, 2014; Bakioğlu & Certel, 2010; Botas & Huisman, 2013; Endes, 2015; Özdem, 2016; Papatsiba, 2005). In a mixed-study, Papatsiba (2005) analyzed the Erasmus experiences of 80 participants through student accounts. Results showed that the academic experience was the most developed component as reported by the participants. They appreciated the quality of the education they received in the host country. Similarly, Bakioğlu & Certel (2010) focused specifically on the academic lives of the Turkish Erasmus exchange students. The qualitative data gathered from 30 university students revealed that the participants found studying abroad academically important and advantageous. They were especially affected by the learning environments and the student-centered teaching method they witnessed. In addition, Aslan & Jacobs (2014) examined the views of 95 Erasmus students and qualitative findings indicated that the participants mainly appreciated practicing opportunities, social projects, flexible exams, teamwork, flexible attendance and elective course opportunities.

On the other hand, Di Pietro & Page (2008) draw attention to a crucial point in terms of the impact of the Erasmus program on the academic development. They claim that early school performance is one of the most important predictors of studying abroad. In other words, the students who have a chance to benefit from the Erasmus program already

effective academic skills prior to their mobility. As they put forward, “The students with poor academic records are less likely to go abroad with Erasmus than their peers who have good academic records. Since the number of applicants is higher than the number of places available, universities have to set up selection processes that are based on past student performance” (Di Pietro & Page, 2008, p. 396). Apart from the early academic records, another important predictor of participating in the Erasmus program is the language competence of the participants. In Souto-Otero’s (2008) study, it was observed that the participants were already competent in foreign languages before the Erasmus mobility. The reason for this situation is “the selection processes” employed by the universities. By means of these processes, only the students who have a good command of foreign languages and good early school performance are selected as Erasmus participants.

In spite of some specific requirements, it was proved by many studies that the Erasmus program contributes to the language development of the participants in several aspects (Aslan-Özdemir, 2019; Cantez, 2020; Çağlar-Erdoğan, 2019; Çepni et al., 2018; Jacobone & Moro, 2015; Kayaoğlu, 2016; Llanes et al., 2012; Özmen, 2019). To illustrate, Aslan-Özdemir (2019) explored the effects of studying in European countries where English is used as a lingua franca on 140 Turkish Erasmus exchange students’ English reading, listening, grammar and vocabulary proficiency development. In this quasi-experimental study, the data was collected through Erasmus Online Linguistic Support (OLS) test. Before and after the mobility, the students completed OLS test which included grammar, reading, listening and vocabulary sections. The results revealed that the participants improved their reading, listening, vocabulary and grammar English proficiency levels significantly after the Erasmus mobility. While the vocabulary was the most improved area, there was decrease in some participants’ reading and grammar level. Additionally, Llanes et al. (2012) conducted an empirical study in order to examine the effects of Erasmus experience on the written and oral performance of 24 Spanish Erasmus students studying English as a second language in the UK. As a result of the written and oral data elicited from the participants, it was found that the linguistic gains were more significant in oral than in written production. Similarly, in Kayaoğlu’s (2016) study more improvement was observed in the participants’ oral proficiency. It was seen from the students’ self-reports that they appreciated the opportunity to use English in a meaningful context. As more contemporary examples, Çağlar-Erdoğan (2019) and Cantez (2020) also observed positive results in terms of speaking skills of the Erasmus students. The findings of the mixed-method research by Çağlar-Erdoğan (2019) indicated that the students developed self-confidence in using English after the Erasmus

mobility. Moreover, Cantez (2020) investigated the views of the Erasmus participants regarding their foreign language motivation and speaking fluency development. The qualitative findings showed that Erasmus exchange program contributed to participants' English speaking fluency and foreign language learning motivation.

Focusing on a different aspect of language development, several studies investigated the impact of the Erasmus program on the participants' attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language (Karadeniz-Cısdık, 2014; Mulcar, 2019; Yardımcı, 2014). For instance, with a focus on the high school students who participated in the Erasmus Plus Key Action 2 mobilities, Mulcar (2019) investigated the attitudes of 84 high school students toward English language before and after the mobility. The findings of this mixed-method study revealed that the students' attitudes toward learning English improved as a result of the intercultural interactions during Erasmus Plus KA2 mobilities. Similarly, in Yardımcı's (2014) study, it was indicated that the university students realized the importance of speaking English especially in an international context. On the other hand, Karadeniz-Cısdık's (2014) study revealed that Turkish Erasmus students' overall beliefs remained almost the same after the Erasmus program. Although some of their beliefs such as the importance of grammar in language learning significantly changed, it was suggested that short-time periods spent abroad might not result in significant changes in students' beliefs.

The studies in which the language development was found to be mostly in terms of oral skills are in line with Kinginger's (2008) assertion. She claims that the Erasmus experience particularly contributes to the oral skills of most Erasmus participants. The Erasmus exchange program enables the students to spend a part of their education abroad, get to know a different culture in a different country and meet new people for a certain period of time. Even though the students do not know the native language of the host country, they communicate in English as a common language in order to meet their daily and academic needs. This situation gives them a chance to use English for communicative purposes in a genuine context. Jacobone & Moro (2015, p.325) emphasized the importance of communicating in a meaningful context as follows:

“One of the principal advantages of study abroad is its power to expand the four walls of the traditional language classroom to include the streets and people of any given culture. Out-of-class contact, whether interactive (with host families and friends) or noninteractive (going to the theatre, cinema, listening to music, etc.), plays a critical role in second language acquisition.”

According to the findings of the related studies and the assertions by Kinginger (2008) and Jacobone & Moro (2015), it can be seen that the Erasmus program positively contributes to the language development of the participants, especially to their oral skills. However, as mentioned before, basic knowledge of foreign languages is necessary in order to have a chance to participate in the program. Therefore, it should not be regarded as a language learning program.

Some studies on the Erasmus program also proved that participating in the program positively affected the social development of the participants (Bakioğlu & Certel, 2010; Botas & Huisman, 2013; Bryła, 2015; Çelik, 2018; Sigalas, 2010; Şahin, 2019). In the framework of the Erasmus program, the participants had an international social environment, which enables them to form international friendships (Bryła, 2015), socialize with Europeans (Sigalas, 2010a), and improve their social capitals (Botas & Husiman, 2013). Additionally, in a recent study Şahin (2019) evaluated the opinions of 30 university students regarding their Erasmus experiences in terms of management. In this qualitative research, the data was gathered through interviews conducted face-to-face or e-mail environment. The results indicated that the participants made international friends, contributed to their social relations, and established business network connections.

As can be seen in the studies mentioned above, the Erasmus program creates chances for the participants to develop their social skills in a multicultural environment. This kind of social context pave the way for cultural development as evidenced in various studies (Bozkaya & Erdem-Aydın, 2010; Demirel & Demir, 2016; Gökten, 2017; Kağnıcı, 2016; Mulcar, 2019; Mutlu et al., 2010; Özışık, 2017; Özmen, 2019; Pehlivaner, 2006; Sancak, 2009; Sari, 2014; Sigalas, 2010). These studies focused on the cultural development from different perspectives. Some researchers investigated the impact of the Erasmus program on European identity (Kağnıcı, 2016; Pehlivaner, 2006; Sari, 2014; Sigalas, 2010a), others focused on the role of the program in intercultural dialogue (Bozkaya & Erdem-Aydın, 2010; Sancak, 2009), and also cultural intelligence was another focal point that was investigated (Demirel & Demir, 2016; Gökten, 2017). Sancak (2009) aimed to uncover the role of the Erasmus program in intercultural dialogue through the eyes of the participants and she concluded that the program plays a crucial role in intercultural dialogue and also it reinforces the intercultural relations. Moreover, it was emphasized by the participants that the European students who had had wrong and negative points of view about Turkey broke their prejudices when they got to know Turkish students. This example illustrates that the Erasmus students also have chances to represent their culture during their mobility.

The degree of cultural development can vary based upon the nationality of the Erasmus students. A comparative study carried out by Mutlu, Alacahan and Erdil (2010) attempted to make a comparison of the personal and cultural change taking place between European Union (EU) students and Turkish students throughout the Erasmus program. In order to gather data, face-to-face interviews were conducted with a total of 257 Erasmus students. Based on the research findings it was concluded that “the rate of change, of shaking off prejudices, of becoming more understanding, of achieving individualism and self-realization, of forming different world views and learning to take risks is higher among Turkish students” (p.42). To put it simply, although certain personal and cultural changes occurred among all participants, the ratio of these changes were higher among Turkish students compared to EU students. This finding proves that Erasmus program is a valuable experience especially for Turkish students.

When the literature on the Erasmus exchange program is examined, it is seen that personal development was proved to be one of the most valuable contributions of the Erasmus program by various studies (Akman, 2014; Çepni et al., 2018, Jacobone & Moro, 2015; Kasapoğlu-Önder & Balcı, 2010; Kohn, 2015; Mutlu et al., 2010; Özdem, 2016; Özmen, 2019; Papatsiba, 2005; Raikou & Karalis, 2010; Yücelsin-Taş, 2013). In the framework of the Erasmus exchange program, the students spend a whole semester in a different country away from their families. Consequently, they need to take their own responsibility, which increases their self-confidence. For instance, Kohn (2015) examined the cultural, social, personal, and academic influences of the Fulbright and Erasmus exchange programs through the participants’ perspectives. In this phenomenological study, data were collected from 41 students (24 Erasmus and 17 Fulbright students) through face-to-face and semi-structured interviews. According to the findings, the participants emphasized their personal gains in terms of self-confidence and improving leadership skills such as overcoming problems, decision-making, planning and taking responsibility. Similarly, in their qualitative study conducted with 13 Erasmus students, Çepni et al. (2018) revealed that the participants described themselves as stronger individuals after their Erasmus experience. They freed from their fears, learned how to deal with challenges and manage their stress.

Furthermore, Papatsiba (2005) analyzed 80 Erasmus students’ accounts on their experiences and the results indicated that the Erasmus mobility triggered personal growth and individual autonomy. The participants reported that they were better able to face changing environments, monitor themselves, and take control on their life-path. The

findings of the aforementioned studies seem to be in parallel with the idea that mobility becomes a feature of “elective biography”, which is described as a form of “do-it-yourself biography” by Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (1999, p. 157 as cited in Papatsiba, 2005, p.33). This assumption suggests that the mobility programs encourage the participants to become freer individuals by embracing change and accepting risks, which results in personal fulfilment.

The studies which provided evidence for the positive impact of the Erasmus program on the career development are also high in number (Aktan & Sarı, 2010; Çelik, 2018; Ece, 2018; Engel, 2010; Jacobone & Moro, 2015; Messer & Wolter, 2007; Raikou & Karalis, 2010; Stilianos et al., 2013; Teichler & Janson, 2007; Tekin & Hiç-Gencer, 2013). The common finding of these studies in terms of career development is that the participants believed studying abroad for one semester in the framework of the Erasmus program would distinguish them from their peers in the work place. In a quantitative study, Endes (2015) investigated the contributions of Erasmus experience to the career development of the participants. The data was gathered from 50 university students via the Erasmus Satisfaction Survey. The findings illustrated that the participants believed their Erasmus experience to create a plus to their Curriculum Vitae. In addition, in a review of empirical studies about the impact of Erasmus mobility on the professional career, Engel (2010) stated that the Erasmus students “feel to be better prepared for future employment and to be somewhat better at field specific knowledge and skills” (p.5). Moreover, as Messer & Wolter (2007) put forward, the students who participated in the Erasmus exchange program had higher starting salaries upon their graduation.

There are also studies which focused on the Erasmus experiences of Turkish prospective teachers (Demir & Demir, 2009; Ersoy, 2013; Ersoy & Günel, 2011, Ünlü, 2015). In their qualitative study, Demir & Demir (2009) evaluated the Erasmus experiences of 12 Turkish students who studied at the Faculty of Education. The findings revealed that their experience contributed to their professional skills by enabling them to feel confident in teaching, learn about the educational systems of different countries, and become more efficient in communication as future teachers. Ersoy & Günel (2011) analysed the same issue through the eyes of foreign prospective teachers who came to Turkey in the framework of the Erasmus program. They found that cross-cultural experiences of foreign pre-service teachers helped them to improve their professional skills and contributed to their individual development. It was also indicated that diverse field experiences assisted the participants to understand the importance of infusing multicultural approach in their classrooms. During

their experience in the university, they also became aware of various instructional methods and different teacher-student relationships.

Apart from these studies, some other studies specifically focused on the career development of the Erasmus students from various majors such as Nursing, Architecture, and Tourism and Management. Zerman (2014) investigated the Erasmus experiences of tourism major students, Biçer et al. (2014) explored the contributions of the Erasmus Program to the nursing students, Aksayan (2010) examined the Erasmus program through the eyes of architecture students and Özkan & Mutdoğan (2018) evaluated the opinions of the interior architecture and environmental design students, who participated in the Erasmus Program. According to the findings of these studies, the Erasmus program positively affected the participants' career development regardless of their major. Also, the studies of Akman (2014) and Ece (2018) showed that the participants felt more confident in career planning after the Erasmus mobility. All these studies seem to confirm Teichler and Janson's (2007) claim that the Erasmus program had a positive impact on subsequent employment and career of the participant.

The review of the related literature clearly shows that studying abroad in the framework of the Erasmus program for at least one semester brings about noteworthy contributions to the development of the participants in various aspects. However, it was also seen in many national and international research that the Erasmus process was not easy and the participants encountered a wide range of problems and challenges throughout this process (Aktemur, 2019; Aslan & Jacobs, 2014; Brown & Aktaş, 2011; Endes, 2015; Erdem-Mete, 2017; Ersoy, 2013; Keles, 2013; Sancak, 2009; Souto-Otero et al., 2013; Vevere et al., 2017; Yanpar-Yelken et al., 2012; Yücelsin-Taş, 2013; Zerman, 2014). Among the common problems faced by the participants, there were linguistic, cultural, financial, academic problems.

Intercultural dialogue between the Erasmus students can be achieved through cultural exchange and the language has a crucial function in this process as a tool for transferring culture. In the transfer of culture, students from different countries must have good command of the common language they use to communicate with each other. If the command of this language is low, it affects the communication negatively (Sancak, 2009). Zerman's study (2014) illustrates this situation. Based on the experiences of the students it was revealed that the participants had difficulty in communicating since they found themselves linguistically inadequate during the mobility period. In a similar vein, Yanpar-

Yelken et al. (2012) carried out a descriptive study in order to compare the problems encountered by the Erasmus students in two different countries: Turkey and Belgium. Through an 18-item questionnaire, the data was gathered from 81 students (23 in Turkey and 58 in Belgium). The findings indicated that the most common problem faced by the Erasmus students in Turkey and Belgium was the language related problems. Besides, the participants in Belgium had academic-related problems such as compulsory attendance, too many presentations and too much homework. They also had problems related to accommodation, finance, weather, transportation, and visa procedure. In another study, Yücelsin-Taş (2013) examined the the problems encountered by students who went to France within the framework of the Erasmus program, before they departed, during their education abroad and after they returned. The research data were gathered through a questionnaire with open-ended questions from 40 Erasmus students studying in the Department of French Language Teaching. According to the findings, the most important problem encountered in the pre-Erasmus process was the late arrival of documents from the host universities, the most important problem encountered during their education abroad was the lack of sufficient foreign language competence, and the most prominent problem after their return was academic problems related to the matching of courses.

Another example for the problems encountered by the Erasmus students was provided by the study of Vevere et al. (2017). In their empirical study, they researched the critical aspects of cultural adaptation process of Erasmus students in Latvia. According to research data, the most problematic factors in the participants' cultural and social adaptation were the lack of crucial information about the receiving country and the host universities. They experienced culture shock due to the differences in lifestyle, food and dining traditions, difficulties in communication, etc. The participants had difficulties in communicating with the local residents and largely perceived Latvian people as being introverted.

Finally, the majority of the studies in the related literature indicate that the Erasmus students encountered financial problems even though they received Erasmus grant. Yanpar-Yelken et al. (2012) state that the economic situation of the Erasmus students depends on the socio-economic condition of their host country. However, in Souto-Otero et al.'s (2013) study which was conducted with a large group of participants from seven European countries, the financial problems were mentioned regardless of the host countries of the students. The participants of the study consist of 11.517 Erasmus students, 4.974 students who consider participation in Erasmus but did not take part, and 1.354 students who did not consider participation in the program. The data were derived from a web survey



commissioned by the European Parliament and carried out in 2010 in seven countries (Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Spain, Poland, Sweden, United Kingdom). According to the findings, the financial problems were perceived as an important barrier to the student mobility. The study drew attention to the importance of financial support for Erasmus mobility and advised that the amount of grant should be increased in order to stimulate participation in the Erasmus program.

Contrary to the aforementioned studies, in a recent study conducted by Aktemur (2019) the results were different. With the aim of examining the difficulties faced by the Erasmus participants, a questionnaire was applied to 50 university students and it was found that most of the Erasmus students did not experience cultural, religious or social problems in their host countries. Only the problems related to the daily habits were reported by some participants. Accordingly, it was concluded that the Erasmus participants did not encounter serious problems. In spite of this unique result, overall results of the previously mentioned studies suggest that throughout the Erasmus process, the students encountered mainly linguistic, cultural, financial, and academic problems. In order to minimise the problems, various suggestions and coping strategies were presented in the related literature.

All studies mentioned in this section focused on the Erasmus experiences of the students from different departments. As stated before, the review of literature on the Erasmus program shows that there is a lack of research which investigate the impact of the Erasmus program by focusing solely on Turkish prospective EFL teachers. In the following part, the studies which evaluated the Erasmus program through the eyes of Turkish prospective EFL teachers are presented in a detailed way.

## **2.7. Studies with Turkish prospective EFL Teachers**

There is an increasing body of research on the impact of the Erasmus exchange program as illustrated in the previous section. However, the majority of these studies were conducted with the Erasmus students from the other departments. Only a small body of research focused specifically on the Erasmus experience of Turkish prospective EFL teachers (Aydın, 2012; Caner, 2019; Çiftçi, 2016; İltir, 2013; Kızılaslan, 2010; Önen, 2017; Yıldırım & İlin, 2013). The review of literature on the Erasmus exchange program clearly shows that studying abroad in the framework of the Erasmus program for at least one semester is a valuable experience for the participants. Blair (2002) argues that teacher

preparation programs need to include more international and global experiences in order to enable prospective teachers to become more sensitive toward the diverse student population that they will find in their classrooms. He claims that an increase of global and cross-cultural perspectives can greatly assist teachers in effectively teaching the changing student population around the world and such perspectives may be enhanced through study abroad experiences. Taking into consideration the fact that Turkish prospective EFL teachers have a chance to study in a multicultural context through the Erasmus program, it is essential to explore the impact and outcomes of the mobility process.

In a recent study, Caner (2019) examined the perceptions of 19 prospective EFL teachers qualitatively regarding the contribution of short term Erasmus experiences to their career development. The analysis of the data gathered through two-round e-mail interviews revealed that studying in an international environment positively affected the participants' future profession by raising their awareness on active learning, inclusive practices and international education policies. It was also underlined that those gains were achieved by all participants regardless of the qualities of their host institutions. In addition, with a more holistic approach, Aydın (2012) conducted a qualitative study and collected data from 23 prospective EFL teachers through a background questionnaire, interviews, group discussions and essay papers. The results revealed that the Erasmus program contributed considerably to participants' language skills and knowledge, their professional and personal development, and their perceptions towards culture and recreational activities. On the other hand, it also brought about some potential problems related to formal procedure, adaptation process, linguistic and cultural differences. In a similar vein, Önen (2017) explored the contributions of the Erasmus program to 30 Turkish prospective EFL teachers and the problems encountered in the process. According to the findings, the participants benefited from the program mostly in terms of cultural accumulation and personal development. It was also found that the pre-Erasmus period was reported as the most challenging period by the participants especially due to the paper work. Indeed, the formal procedure seems to be an overwhelming process for most of the Erasmus students. The same result was also found in Çiftçi's (2016) study which focused on the pre-mobility phase of the Erasmus program. In his phenomenological study, he analysed the lived and imagined experiences of three Turkish prospective EFL teachers who studied in England for 4 months in the framework of the Erasmus program. The preparation process of the participants were observed through semi-structured interviews, smartphone messages and reports written by the participants. It was found that the participants experienced a stressful formal preparation which involved

excessive paper work and strict visa procedures. Since they had to allocate most of their time to the formal preparation period with insufficient guidance, they lacked awareness about the informal preparation. Moreover, the participants developed a fear of speaking English and had stereotyped attitude toward the host country. These kinds of stereotyped attitudes and perceptions may decrease the cultural gains provided by the Erasmus program. For instance, Kızılaslan (2010) conducted a qualitative study with the participation of 10 prospective EFL teachers who benefited from the Erasmus program and found that prior to their successful acculturation, the participants had to deal with preconceptions about their home country, specifically regarding women issues, religion, and family life. Similarly, Yıldırım & İlin (2013) explored the Erasmus experiences of 55 prospective EFL teachers with specific reference to how they managed to adapt to a new culture. The analysis of the data collected by Sociocultural Adaptation Scale, reports, and interviews indicated that the participants experienced problems at affective, behavioural, and cognitive levels. The bias towards their home country was reported to be the greatest obstacle to the adaptation process of Turkish prospective EFL teachers. In spite of these inhibiting factors, it is proved that the Erasmus experience creates changes in the perception of the participants. In a qualitative study, İltir (2013) investigated whether the prospective EFL teachers who joined the Erasmus exchange program changed their point of view about different cultures and raised their language and cultural awareness of different countries. The data was gathered from 10 participants via the semi-structured interviews and the results revealed that the participants not only gained cross-cultural awareness but also improved awareness of their own culture. Moreover, they gained both individual and social responsibilities, felt ready for their future career and perceived themselves as a global citizen by means of the Erasmus exchange program.

As it is illustrated in the abovementioned studies, Turkish prospective EFL teachers who participated in the Erasmus program returned their hometown with valuable gains. On the other hand, they encountered various problems throughout their Erasmus experience. In order to maximize the contributions and minimize the problems, it is essential to gain deeper insight into the issue. However, there are insufficient amount of studies which focused on the Turkish prospective EFL teachers. Hence, this study attempts to narrow the scope and solely focus on the Erasmus experiences of Turkish prospective EFL teachers in order to explore the contributions of the program and the problems encountered in the process.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Introduction

The third chapter of the study presents the methodology of the research by introducing research design, research questions, participants, data collection tools, data collection procedure and data analysis. Lastly, the role of the researcher is also mentioned.

#### 3.2. Research Design

The current study has been conducted using the triangulation design model, which is the most common approach to mixed methods (Creswell et al., 2003). The term “mixed methods” refers to “a methodology of research that systematically integrates or mixes quantitative and qualitative data within a single investigation” (Wisdom & Creswell, 2013). This design is used “to obtain different but complementary data on the same topic” (Morse, 1991, p. 122) to best understand the research problem. Cohen and Manion (1986) define triangulation as an “attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behaviour by studying it from more than one standpoint” (p.254). In the light of this method, the current study firstly implemented the online survey to describe the characteristics of the participants, and to answer the research questions. Then, semi-structured interviews were carried out in order to be able to explain the survey results in a detailed way.

The aim of this study was to investigate the contributions of Erasmus exchange program to Turkish prospective EFL teachers’ academic, language, social, cultural, personal, career development and the problems they encountered during the process. By combining quantitative and qualitative research methods, it was aimed to gain a broader understanding of the experience of the participants in order to answer the research questions below:

- 1) To what extent does Erasmus exchange program contribute to prospective EFL teachers’ development in various fields?

- 2) What are the contributions of Erasmus exchange program to prospective EFL teachers' academic development?
- 3) What are the contributions of Erasmus exchange program to prospective EFL teachers' language development?
- 4) What are the contributions of Erasmus exchange program to prospective EFL teachers' social development?
- 5) What are the contributions of Erasmus exchange program to prospective EFL teachers' cultural development?
- 6) What are the contributions of Erasmus exchange program to prospective EFL teachers' personal development?
- 7) What are the contributions of Erasmus exchange program to prospective EFL teachers' career development?
- 8) Do prospective EFL teachers encounter any problems during the Erasmus process?
- 9) In which period (before, during, or after the Erasmus) do prospective EFL teachers have the most problems?
- 10) What type of problems do prospective EFL teachers encounter in each period of the Erasmus process?

### **3.3. Participants**

The study was conducted with the voluntary participation of 37 prospective teachers studying English Language Teaching (ELT) at Dokuz Eylül University who participated in the Erasmus Exchange Program for at least one semester. Their age ranges between 18 and 22. Although a gender-based analysis was not within the scope of this study, it should be noted that the majority of the participants are females. Twenty-seven (73%) participants were female and ten (27%) were male in the study.

In order to determine the participants of this study, Criterion Sampling, one of the Purposeful Sampling methods, was used. In this sampling method, the individuals are selected based on the assumption that they possess knowledge and experience with the phenomenon of interest and thus will be able to provide 'detailed (depth) and generalizable (breadth)' information (Palinkas et al., 2015, p.539). In other words, they are selected because they meet the same criteria and they are assumed to be "representative" of that role. In addition to knowledge and experience, Bernard (2002) mentions the importance of

availability and willingness to participate, and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in a reflective manner. Patton (2002) states the logic of Purposeful Sampling as follows:

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling. Studying information-rich cases yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations (Patton, 2002, p. 230).

In the current study, the participants were selected based on the criterion “Prospective EFL Teachers from Dokuz Eylül University who participated in the Erasmus Exchange Program”, which was correspondent with the aims of the study. Table 4 below presents a detailed description of the participants. It shows the gender, the Erasmus year of each participant, the host country and city of the participants.

Table 4

*The Distribution of Participants by Gender, Year of Doing Erasmus, and the Host City/Country*

<b>Background Information</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	27	73
Male	10	27
<b>Academic Year</b>		
2014-2015	4	10,8
2015-2016	5	13,5
2016-2017	3	8,1
2017-2018	11	29,7
2018-2019	9	24,3
2019-2020	5	13,5

<b>City / Country</b>		
Koszalin / Poland	6	16,2
Warsaw / Poland	4	10,8
Gdansk / Poland	1	2,7
Budapest / Hungary	7	18,9
Coimbra/ Portugal	4	10,8
Antwerp / Belgium	4	10,8
Joensuu / Finland	3	8,1
Madrid / Spain	3	8,1
Copenhagen /Denmark	2	5,4
Vilnius / Lithuania	1	2,7
Kaunas / Lithuania	1	2,7
Daugavpils / Latvia	1	2,7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>100</b>

As seen in Table 4, the participants of this study went to nine different European countries as part of the Erasmus Program. The numbers and placements of the participants were eleven (29.7%) in Poland, seven (18.9%) in Hungary, four (10.8%) in Portugal, four (10.8%) in Belgium, three (8.1 %) in Finland, three (8.1%) in Spain, two (5.4%) in Denmark, two (5.4%) in Lithuania, and one (2.7%) in Latvia. The vast majority of the periods of participation in the Erasmus program are between 2017-2018 and 2018-2019.

Table 5 below presents the distribution of the participants by their host universities. As can be seen, the majority of the participants did their Erasmus in Poland.

Table 5

*The Distribution of the Participants by Their Host Countries and Universities*

<b>Host Country</b>	<b>Host University</b>	<b>No. of Students</b>
Poland	Koszalin University of Technology	6
	University of Warsaw	4
	University of Gdansk	1
Hungary	Kodolanyi Janos Foiskola of Applied Sciences	6
	Eötvös Loránd University	1
Portugal	University of Coimbra	2
	Coimbra Superior School of Education	1
	Polytechnic Institute of Coimbra	1
Belgium	Artesis Plantijn University College	3
	University of Antwerp	1
Finland	University of Eastern Finland	3
Spain	University of Alcala	3
Denmark	University College Copenhagen	2
Lithuania	Lithuanian University of Educational Sciences	1
	Vytautas Magnus University	1
Latvia	University of Daugavpils	1
<b>Total</b>		<b>37</b>

### 3.4. Data Collection Tools

The data collection tools consisted of an online survey and semi-structured interview questions in accordance with the purpose of the study. Since the research was conducted using the triangulation design model, both quantitative and qualitative tools were implemented. The online survey was used to collect data quantitatively and the semi-structured interview was used to collect data qualitatively. First, an online survey was completed by 37 students. Then, the interviews were conducted with 10 volunteer students out of the total participants. By combining two different kinds of tools it was aimed to gain a broader perspective on the phenomenon. The data collection tools are described in detail below.

#### 3.4.1. Online Survey

An online survey (Appendix-5) which had been developed by Önen (2017) was used to collect data from Turkish prospective EFL teachers who had participated in the Erasmus Program. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was more practical to use the online survey in order to encourage the participation of the students. An online survey tool called Survey Monkey(2020) was used in this study.

Surveys are preferred data collection tools in order to gather data from social science disciplines (Rossi, Wright, & Anderson, 2013). They enable collecting data that monitor trends in the society, examine people's intellection of social processes. It is a device to identify social processes. Brown (2001) defines surveys as "any written instruments that present respondents with series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting them among existing answers" (p. 6).

The survey (See Appendix-5) consists of three parts. The first part includes ten questions for demographics such as the education status of the participants, e.g. I'm a student / I'm a graduate; the academic year of the Erasmus mobility, e.g. 2018-2019; the name of the host country; and the name of the host university.

The second part of the survey consists of a Likert-scale, a multiple choice, and a rank-order scale questions. In the Likert-scale question, participants are asked to answer the question: "*Please evaluate your Erasmus experience in terms of its contributions to your cultural accumulation, language acquisition, and academic, social, and personal development*". In the multiple choice question the participants were asked to answer whether



or not they had any difficulties in the Erasmus programme (pre-Erasmus, during the Erasmus, and post-Erasmus).

The third question was a rank-order scale asking participants to grade the three periods of Erasmus from the most problematic to the least problematic period. The last part of the survey consisted of three open-ended questions. These questions asked participants to explain in detail the the problem they encountered in each period of Erasmus. There was also a follow-up question as “*If you have not encountered any problems, please specify*”.

In the survey, the open-ended questions focused mostly on the problems encountered during the Erasmus process. Thus, the deeper information regarding the contributions of the Erasmus program was gained through the semi-structured interviews. By this way, the survey and the interview complemented each other.

#### **3.4.2. Semi-structured Interview**

Semi-structured interview was conducted to let students reflect on their Erasmus experience in terms of its contributions and difficulties encountered during the process, which was the focus of the study. İltter (2013) states that semi-structured interview is flexible and encourages two-way communication. In this study, to gain a deeper understanding about the participants’ Erasmus experience, the semi-structured interview was conducted with 10 volunteer participants selected randomly out of 37 participants who had completed the survey. The average size for this interview was suggested from 6-12 (Lindlof & Taylor 2002, p. 182). That is why, 10 students were randomly selected for the interview. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, it was not possible to meet the participants physically. Therefore, the interviews were conducted via Skype and lasted 40 minutes for every individual.

Before starting the interview, some information about the goal of the study and the importance of participants’ contribution to the study was provided briefly by the researcher. During the semi-structured interviews, participants shared their Erasmus experiences in a detailed way. The researcher had a deeper understanding of the phenomenon thanks to their responses. The answers of the following questions were sought in the interview sessions:

- 1- What were your reasons to join the Erasmus program?
- 2- Have you been abroad before?
- 3- What did you pay attention to when choosing your country and school?

4- Do you think the Erasmus program has contributed to your academic, language, social, cultural, personal, and career development? If yes, what are these contributions?

5- What were the difficulties you had before the mobility?

6- What were the difficulties you had during the mobility?

7- What were the difficulties you experienced after the mobility?

8- How did you overcome these difficulties?

9- What has changed in your life after the Erasmus program?

Lee (2005) suggests that the language in which the interviews and surveys are conducted can affect the participants' answer to varying degrees across a broad range of topics. Similarly, Tran and Williams (1994) argue that the same phenomenon may carry different meanings dependent on whether the phenomenon is communicated in the person's first or second language. Taking into consideration the fact that the language has an influence on the reliability and validity of research tools, in the current study both the online survey and the interviews were conducted in Turkish, which was the first language of the participants and the researcher.

### **3.5. Data Collection Procedure**

The data collection procedure consists of two stages: The implementation of the online survey and the semi-structured interviews. Before the implementation, the participants signed the consent forms (See Appendix 4). The necessary official permission paper was obtained from Ethical Committee of Dokuz Eylül University (See Appendix-2). To be able to use the online survey which had been developed by Serap Önen, the researcher's permission was received via e-mail (See Appendix-3) and the survey was sent to the participants via e-mail. The Cronbach's Alpha value of the survey was calculated as .811.

Erdem-Mete (2017) states that the students who returned from the Erasmus programme are in a better position to evaluate the positive and negative sides of their experience objectively. That is why, only the returned students were contacted and asked for participation. The study was introduced to the participants and the survey link was sent through an e-mail to the participants who volunteered to take part in the study.

Out of 37 participants who completed the survey, 10 volunteer students were randomly chosen for the semi-structured interview sessions. The interviews were conducted in March 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic at that time, it was not possible to conduct face to face interviews. That is why each one of the ten participants was interviewed online via Skype. Some benefits of the online qualitative research are explained as follows:

Online interviewing is easily negotiated through applications; reduced travel, venue and transcribing costs; reduced need for synchronous interview times; access costs reduced by reading and composing interactions off-line; easy communication storage and archiving; ease of distribution of discourse interpretations to participants for evaluation; and ease of publishing and updating results online. (Clarke, 2000, p.7)

The interview questions were sent by e-mail to the participants before the interview sessions. Apart from the interview questions (See Appendix-6), some guiding questions were used as well. The sessions were recorded using a voice-recording device. For every individual, each interview session lasted nearly 40 minutes. The data collection procedure was completed in eight weeks.

As mentioned before, the language of the data collection tools has a considerable influence on the participants' answer (Tran & Williams, 1994; Lee, 2005). That is why both the online survey and the interviews were conducted in Turkish, which was the first language of the participants and the researcher. By this way, it was aimed to reach valid and reliable conclusions through letting the participants express themselves and their experiences easefully.

### **3.6. Data Analysis**

The data analysis process started with the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the online survey first and proceed with the qualitative analysis of the semi-structured interview.

For the analysis of the data obtained through the online survey application, the responses given by the participants were downloaded first. For each participant, a number was assigned such as S1, S2, and S3 randomly. As stated before, the first part of the survey consists of some demographic information. Based on the responses given in this part, a data summary sheet was generated. Thus, it became easy to examine the profiles of the participants.

The second part of the survey, which consisted of Likert-scale, multiple choice, and rank-order scale questions, was analysed quantitatively in terms of frequencies and percentages, while the third part of the survey was analysed qualitatively. In the analysis of the open-ended questions, content analysis was performed. Here, the data of the problem under consideration are categorized from an inductive perspective. In the research, new categories are created in each case where data containing similar fields are not available (Ekiz, 2009). Afterwards, the categories in question are interpreted. In this context, new category groups were created in this regard, in order to identify the problems encountered before Erasmus, during Erasmus and after Erasmus.

As mentioned before, the open-ended questions in the survey focused mostly on the problems encountered during the Erasmus process. Thus, the deeper information regarding the contributions of the Erasmus program was gained through the semi-structured interviews. By this way, the survey and the interview complemented each other both methodologically and contextually.

Following the analysis of the online survey, the analysis of the semi-structured interviews started. First of all, the audio-recorded interviews were immediately transcribed as spoken in Turkish by the researcher. Verbatim transcription technique was used at this stage. Verbatim transcription refers to the word-for-word reproduction of verbal data (Poland, 1995). This technique requires typing each and every word heard in the audio file including false starts, self-corrections, filler words, grammatical errors, repetitions, and stutters.

In the next stage, Turkish transcripts were translated into English. In order to ensure the accuracy of the transcripts, the method of back translation (Smith, Bond, & Kâğıtçıbaşı, 2006) was used. Two of the interview transcripts were back-translated from English to Turkish. Then, all data was checked by the researcher by listening to the audio recordings and comparing them to the transcripts.

Transcribed and translated interviews were analyzed by content analysis to identify conditions, actions, phenomena, and consequences in relation to the Erasmus experiences of Turkish ELT students (Richards & Morse, 2007). A qualitative analysis software called MAXQDA 2020 (VERBI Software, 2019) was used to assist with coding and categorizing the data, identifying emerging themes, and selecting exemplars to illustrate Turkish prospective EFL teachers' Erasmus experiences.

### 3.7. Validity and Reliability of the Study

A number of validation strategies which were used in the current study to establish trustworthiness are listed below.

The first validation strategy was triangulation through the use of different data collection methods and tools to compare and confirm findings (Merriam, 2009). One of the two data collection tools used in this study was an online survey developed by Serap Önen (2017). Prior to main study, for the validity of the survey, Önen (2017) conducted a pilot study. Then, some of the questions were revised and a few new items were included in the survey based on the feedback provided from the Erasmus students. The Cronbach's Alpha value of the survey was calculated as .811. Hence, a pilot study was administered for the reliability of the survey and content validity of the survey was maintained based on the feedback from the participants.

The second data collection tool used in the study was the semi-structured interview. The questions were formed with the guidance of the advisor. In order to ensure validity, reinterviewing was performed as suggested by Hitchcock and Hughes (1995). Three participants were randomly selected and asked whether they agree with the interpretation of the data. The selected participants stated that they agreed with the interpretation.

Furthermore, to assure reliable results, 20% of the qualitative data gathered through the interviews have been analyzed by another rater who is an expert in qualitative research. The inter-rater reliability between the two raters for 20 percent of the data was measured by the use of formula suggested by Huberman and Miles (2002):

$$\frac{\text{Number of agreements} \times 100}{\text{Number of agreements} + \text{Number of disagreements}}$$

*Figure 4.* Inter-rater Reliability Formula by Huberman and Miles (2002).

According to the formula, interrater reliability between two raters has been found to be 93% agreement for the 20 percent of the data. The small amount of mismatched parts that occurred in the coding procedure was negotiated and a consensus was reached at the end.

### **3.7. The Role of the Researcher**

The researcher played an active role in the study. She used her observations during the interviews to enhance the trustworthiness of the study. She recorded the sessions, took some notes and transcribed the data, which helped her gain a deeper understanding of the data.

In addition, it should be noted that the researcher of this study had a chance to study abroad twice when she was a prospective EFL teacher in the framework of Erasmus programme. First, she studied in Spain in 2016 and then in Poland in 2019. As a result, the author has extensive personal and professional knowledge and experience with Erasmus programme. According to Shklarov (2007), such combined history of the author and the participants may enhance the precision of the study.

Choi et al. (2012) also suggest that without contextual understanding, phenomena described in the study may not be fully understood and the findings of the study may be distorted. In other words, “Culturally competent knowledge provides a reliable context for the phenomenon, research questions, results, and interpretations” (Choi et al., 2012, p. 656). In this case, it can be assumed that in the current study the researcher and the participants have a shared history, which creates a context for reliable results and interpretations.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### 4.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to demonstrate the results based on the analysis of the online survey and the semi-structured interview. The findings were presented in detail through the tables and figures in the order of research questions.

#### 4.2. The Results

##### 4.2.1. RQ1: To what extent does Erasmus exchange program contribute to prospective EFL teachers' development in various fields?

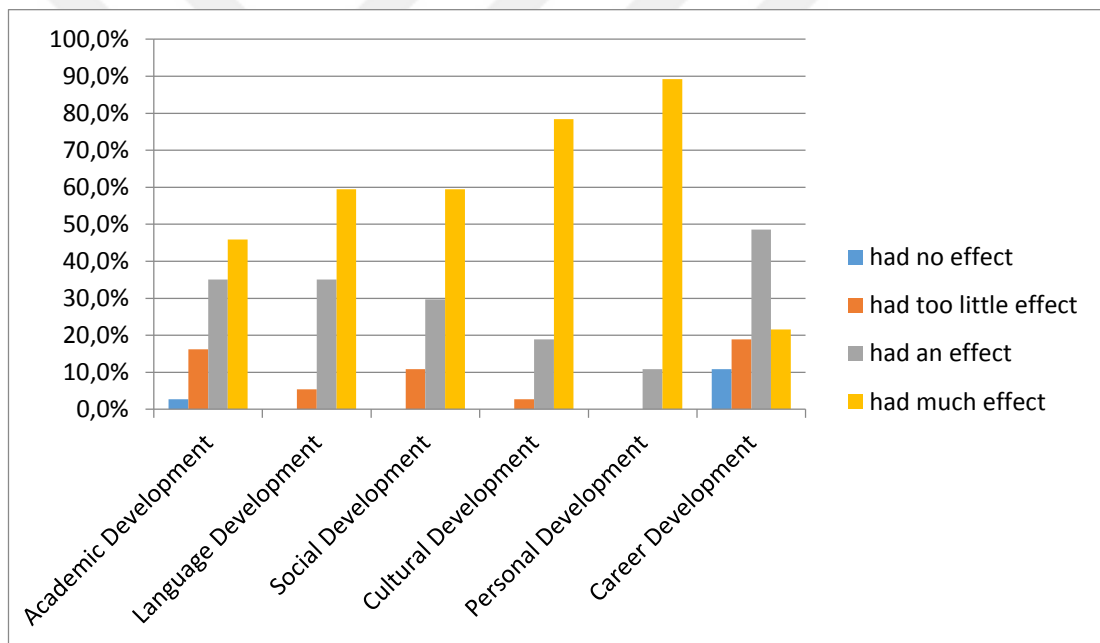
Table 6

*Results for the Contribution of Erasmus Program to the Participants*

	had no effect		had too little effect		had an effect		had much effect	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Academic Development	1	2,7	6	16,2	13	35,1	17	45,9
Language Development	0	0	2	5,4	13	35,1	22	59,5
Social Development	0	0	4	10,8	11	29,7	22	59,5
Cultural Development	0	0	1	2,7	7	18,9	29	78,4
Personal Development	0	0	0	0	4	10,8	33	89,2
Career Development	4	10,8	7	18,9	18	48,6	8	21,6

Table 6 above contains the opinions of the participants regarding the effect of Erasmus experience on academic, social, cultural, personal, language and career development. Accordingly, 33 out of 37 participants (89,2%) think that Erasmus program has much effect, four participants (10,8%) state that it has an effect on their personal development. Similarly, 29 out of 37 participants (78,4%) believe that the program has much effect, seven participants (18,9%) propose that it has an effect and only one participant (2,7%) stated it had too little effect on their cultural development. Language development and social development are perceived as the third contribution of Erasmus program with the

percentage of 59,5% as having much effect on 22 out of 37 participants. Nearly half of the participants think they developed their academic skills thanks to Erasmus program. While 17 out of 37 participants (45,9%) state that Erasmus has much effect, 13 participants (35,1%) believe that it has an effect. However, six out of 37 participants (16,2%) propose that Erasmus has too little effect and only one participant (2,7%) stated it had no effect on their academic development. Career development comes in the last place in terms of the contributions of Erasmus program. Only eight out of 37 participants participants (21,6%) think that Erasmus has much effect on their career development. On the other hand, 18 out of 37 participants (48,6%) stated it has an effect, seven out of 37 participants (18,9%) believed it has too little effect and finally four out of 37 students (10,8%) stated it has no effect on their career development. The results are illustrated with the Figure 5 below.



*Figure 5.* Results for the contribution of Erasmus experience to the participants

In order to gain deeper knowledge about the contributions of Erasmus program to Turkish prospective EFL teachers, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The detailed results of the interviews are presented under the next parts.



#### 4.2.2. RQ2: What are the contributions of Erasmus exchange program to prospective EFL teachers' academic development?

The general distribution of the contributions of Erasmus program to prospective EFL teachers' academic development is illustrated in Table 7. As seen, the most frequently mentioned contribution was "Experiencing a different education system" with 23 turns (38,3%) followed by "Producing projects" with 10 turns (16,7%), "Learning how to do research" with 7 turns (11,7%), "Being able to think critically" and "Better presentation skills" with 6 turns, and finally "Using time efficiently" and "Being more organised" with 4 turns (6,7%).

Table 7

*Findings on the Academic Development of prospective EFL teachers who participated in the Erasmus program*

Main Theme	Sub-Themes	F	%
<b>Academic Development</b>	Experiencing a different education system	23	38,3
	Producing projects	10	16,7
	Learning how to do research	7	11,7
	Being able to think critically	6	10
	Better presentation skills	6	10
	Using time efficiently	4	6,7
	Being more organised	4	6,7
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>60</b>	<b>100</b>

As it is indicated in Table 7, among seven themes identified in the data, the most frequently mentioned contribution regarding the academic development was "**experiencing a different education system**". Most of the participants stated that by attending the Erasmus exchange program, they had a chance to study in the European context, as a result of which they gained new educational insights.

One participant who did Erasmus in Finland expressed his ideas as follows:

"The education system was more student-centered in Finland. Since I was not used to being an active learner, it seemed weird at first. The students were in charge of their own learning. Of course, this is much better, but it was something new for us even if we study educational sciences."  
(Participant 2, Male, NS / Finland)

Another participant mentioned the different types of courses in his host university:

"It was really nice to experience a different education system and learn from international teachers. I had a chance to observe the differences between the two systems. While we did not have to attend theoretical courses, we had to

attend the applied courses. We could access course materials on the school website. The assignments, presentations and projects had much more effect on our grades than the exams.” (Participant 10, Male, AŞ / Lithuania)

The other participant commented on the courses she took during the Erasmus:

“I took nine courses from the ELT department. Actually, I already took most of those courses (for example, Phonetics) in my first year at university. Nevertheless, it was nice to see different ways of teaching the same lesson. In my opinion, the Phonetics should be tested through oral examination rather than written examination.” (Participant 8, Female, ZÖ / Poland)

Lastly, one participant touched upon the courses compulsory for the Finnish ELT students:

“The education was my priority in Erasmus. Finland’s education system is famous worldwide and I was curious about it! When I observed the courses in the ELT department, I saw many differences between Finland’s and Turkey’s education system. For instance, ELT students in Finland took Music, Art, and Physical Education classes as compulsory courses.” (Participant 9, Female, SB / Finland)

Another striking sub-theme which emerged under academic development was observed to be “**producing projects**”. The findings revealed that the prospective EFL teachers had a chance to produce a variety of academic projects during their Erasmus mobility. For example, one participant mentioned a school project they produced voluntarily:

“We produced many enjoyable and educational projects throughout the semester. In one of these projects, we organized activities voluntarily in order to throw the students, parents and teachers together. One professor wore a clown costume and painted his face just for this project. I think the projects that we produced there made me more self-confident.” (Participant 3, Female, TÇ / Belgium)

Similarly, another participant commented on a school project with refugee children:

“When I was there, we carried out a school project with the refugee children. We prepared an education kit for them. The project lasted for four months and I was always together with foreign young learners during this period. This experience affected my attitudes towards Turkish young learners. I realized how important it was to start learning English at young ages.” (Participant 5, Female, SO / Belgium)

Also one of the participants shared her observations from a project with young learners:

“As part of a school project, I went to a primary school in the region in order to observe the 5th grade students during their English lesson. Even if they were young learners, their English was very well. Compared to the 5th grade students in Turkey, they spoke English much better. The school where I

made observation was a state school, not a private school. To be honest, I did not expect their English to be that good.” (Participant 9, Female SB/ Finland)

The third most attended sub-theme was “**learning how to do research**”. The results indicated that this academic contribution was attended especially by the participants who did Erasmus in Finland. This could be explained by the research-based approach adopted in Finnish education system. Below is a quote from a participant who commented on his research homework:

“For the first time I took exams such as routine exam, book exam, essay writing... The exam system was different from the system in Turkey. I managed to write a thirty-page article for a course, which was very challenging. Until that homework, I knew neither how to write bibliography nor how to do research in general.” (Participant 2, Male, NS / Finland)

Another participant reported similar opinions regarding doing research:

“The exam system in Finland was completely different from the exam system in Turkey. We had to do extensive research homework to pass the course. I learned very valuable knowledge about doing research thanks to those homework.” (Participant 9, Female, SB / Finland)

The utterances of another participant who did Erasmus in Belgium are presented below:

“I made a great effort for a research homework. It was highly detailed. While I was doing that homework, I also learned how to do such a detailed research.” (Participant 5, Female, SO / Belgium)

Next most prevalent themes were observed to be “**being able to think critically**” and “**better presentation skills**”. The analysis of the interviews showed that some students thought they improved their critical thinking skills by studying abroad and observing different education systems designed based on the cultural needs of the students. The following extract by one of the participants illustrate this issue clearly:

“After my Erasmus experience, I feel like I improved my critical thinking skills. As far as I observed, the curriculum of Finland was designed based on their cultural needs and it seemed to be successful. I think, by thinking critically I can apply some of the techniques that I learned there. Because of the cultural differences, it is not realistic to apply completely the same program in Turkey. Nevertheless, we may take inspiration at some points.” (Participant 9, Female, SB / Finland)

**“Better presentation skills”** was another sub-theme identified under academic development. With reference to their responses, some participants were more encouraged to make presentation as a result of their practice in the host university. For instance, one participant emphasized her gradual improvement in making presentations as follows:

“During a presentation I used to feel very anxious in front of the people. I made three presentations when I was there. The first one was bad, the second was average, and the last one was perfect! Practice makes perfect, and now I feel more confident during a presentation now. As a prospective EFL teacher, it’s a valuable progress for me.” (Participant 8, Female, ZÖ/ Poland)

The last major sub-themes identified in the data were **“using time efficiently”** and **“being more organised”**. Especially the participants, whose priority during the Erasmus mobility was education, stated that they learned to use their time efficiently in order to submit their homework on time and pass the courses successfully. In this regard, one of the participants made the following comment:

“Some students say that the lessons are easy in Erasmus, but the education of my host university was really challenging. I needed to study hard to pass the courses. Sometimes I couldn’t join the parties since I had to study. As a result, I can say that I learned how to use time efficiently. This is an important contribution for my academic life.” (Participant 5, Female, SO / Belgium)

There were also some participants who regard themselves as a more organised student after their study-abroad experience. One participant, for example, stated in the interview that:

“My success in the lessons made me so happy. I think I continue performing in the same way now. I have been more organised since I returned from Erasmus. Now I do my homework more diligently.” (Participant 9, Female, SB / Finland)

On the other hand, there were a few participants who stated that the Erasmus program did not contribute to their academic development at all. The reason for this situation was explained by one of the participants as below:

“I cannot say the Erasmus program made a big contribution to my academic development because most of the courses I took weren’t related to ELT. There may be small personal differences. However, just doing Erasmus is not enough for this. A personal effort should be given in order to socialize and make the most of the program. In my case, I learned many things from

my foreign friends, which contributed to my personal development.”  
(Participant 7, Male, MK / Hungary)

Overall, it was revealed that the participants’ opinions regarding the contribution of Erasmus program to their academic development differed based on their host university and the quality of education provided in that university. The participants’ general perceptions of their academic gains were positive. Especially the students whose priority was education and the ones who did Erasmus in Finland stated that the Erasmus program gave them a chance to experience a different education system, produce many interesting projects, learning to do research and gaining many skills, which made them more effective learners.

On the other hand, there were a few participants who were not happy with the quality of education provided by their host university. Some of them stated that there wasn’t even ELT department at their host university and they had to take courses which were not related to ELT. In the light of these findings, it could be argued that the country and the host university where the participants did their Erasmus had a considerable impact on their academic gains.

#### **4.2.3. RQ3: What are the contributions of Erasmus exchange program to prospective EFL teachers’ language development?**

As seen in Table 8, 76 turns were provided regarding the contributions of Erasmus program to the participants’ language development, and 20 (26,3%) of these turns were “Speaking fluently” and “Communicating in a meaningful context” followed by 15 turns (19,8%) of “Increased self-confidence in using English”. There were also 10 turns (13,15%) of “Being exposed to various accents”, 6 turns (7,9%) of “Being able to think in English” and 5 turns (6,6%) of “Learning a new language used in the host country”.

Table 8

*Findings on the Language Development of prospective EFL teachers who participated in the Erasmus program*

<b>Main Theme</b>	<b>Sub-Themes</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Language Development</b>	Speaking fluently	20	26,3
	Communicating in a meaningful context	20	26,3
	Increased self-confidence in using English	15	19,8
	Being exposed to various accents	10	13,15
	Being able to think in English	6	7,9
	Learning the language of the host country	5	6,6
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>76</b>	<b>100</b>

Among six themes identified in the data, **“speaking fluently”** and **“communicating in a meaningful context”** were the most prevalent ones. It was revealed that most of the participants had a chance to speak English in a meaningful context for the first time. They think that they improved their English speaking skills and became more fluent.

For example, one participant commented,

“I feel like I speak English more fluently now. Even if we spoke English in the lessons it was not enough. Only two or three sentences can be made in one lesson. However, when I was abroad, I had to speak English everywhere and I realized that I could use English to communicate. Although I did not go to a country where English is spoken as a native language, the Erasmus experience gave me a chance to practice my speaking skill and become more fluent.” (Participant 7, Male, MK / Hungary)

Another participant mentioned her fluency development,

“Even if I’m ELT student, I did not use to speak English a lot. When I was doing Erasmus, I had to speak English so that the people could understand me. At first I felt shy for a few days, but then I needed to socialize. The more I tried, the more fluently I could speak. I can say that the Erasmus experience made a big contribution to my speaking skill.” (Participant 8, Female, ZÖ / Poland)

A quote from another participant is as follows:

“Now I can speak English much more fluently compared to the past. I realized my potential to use the language. I do not think my English was bad, but still it made a huge improvement in my fluency.” (Participant 4, Female, NM / Poland)

Besides, most of the participants stated that even if they were prospective EFL teachers, they had a chance to speak English in a meaningful context for the first time. The data showed that the participants realized their potential to communicate in English.

One participant stated that it was enjoyable to speak English for communicative purposes:

“It was a great experience to use my English to communicate with foreign people in a meaningful context. No matter how fluently I speak English, it feels artificial to speak in a speaking club or in the classroom context. The main purpose is to speak English in these contexts. Speaking English only with the purpose of communicating was an enjoyable experience.” (Participant 6, Male, ÖCU / Hungary)

Another participant mentioned the high number of English speakers in her host country:

“Eight in every ten people whom I met in Finland spoke English very well. Regardless of the age, their competency in English was excellent. In such an environment it was really enjoyable to practice my speaking skill.” (Participant 9, Female, SB / Finland)

Below is a quote from another participant:

“In my host country, nearly everybody spoke English. As ELT students, even if we have been studying English for years, practicing what we have learned is difficult in Turkey, where English is spoken as a foreign language. Throughout the whole semester I spent there, I always had to listen to and speak English. Consequently, I could practice my English skills in a meaningful context.” (Participant 5, Female, SO / Belgium)

Next most prevalent theme was **“increased self-confidence in using English”**. The participants stated that they started to feel more self-confident when they speak English, especially in front of the people. It was revealed that most of the participants’ attitude towards mistakes had changed.

One participant stated,

“I speak English more self-confidently after my Erasmus experience. During small talks, I still make some mistakes, but I do not let these minor mistakes slow me down anymore. Everybody makes mistakes, so I continue speaking. Moreover, when I raise hand and answer a question, I try to use English effectively instead of making short sentences.” (Participant 9, Female, SB / Finland)

Another participant mentioned that she was not afraid of making mistakes anymore:

“My goal was to be more self-confident while speaking English. I mean, I wanted to speak without hesitation. Even if I was a self-confident person, I did not use to speak English self-confidently. Now I’m not afraid of making mistakes. I can say that I achieved my goal in this regard.” (Participant 4, Female, NM / Poland)

A quote from another participant is presented below:

“I used to feel anxious when I speak English in front of people. As far as I observed, I have been more self-confident about speaking English in front of people thanks to my Erasmus experience. It does not mean that I speak English like a native now, but I know that it’s okay to make mistakes and I do not make it a big problem.” (Participant 5, Female, SO / Belgium)

Another common theme emerged from the data was **“being exposed to various accents”**. The results revealed that the students had a chance to observe various accents in the Erasmus context and gained awareness about their own accent as well. Two of the participants’ opinions on this issue are presented below:

“The Erasmus program brings many students from different countries together and in such a context, English was our common language to communicate each other. As a result, I had a chance to hear various accents, which raised my awareness. It was nice to observe how a Polish and a Spanish person spoke English.” (Participant 8, Female, ZÖ / Poland)

“...Another positive effect of the Erasmus program on my language development was gaining knowledge about the accents. I had a chance to hear various accents and pronunciation used by the people from different countries, which affected my English positively. I saw that everybody may make mistakes but the main focus is on communication.” (Participant 9, Female, SB / Finland)

The next prevalent theme identified in the data was **“being able to think in English”**. Some participants stated that they formed a habit of thinking in English during their Erasmus mobility. One participant commented,

“Even after I came back to Turkey, my habit of speaking English continued during my daily routine whether at home or outside. I learned to think in English.” (Participant 2, Male, NS / Finland)

The last theme identified in the data was **“learning the language of the host country”**. The results revealed that some students had a chance to learn the language which is spoken in their host country. They stated that it was enjoyable to try to learn a new language even if they did not improve much:

“I took a course named ‘Survival Finnish’. It was excellent! I could speak Finnish that I needed in my daily life thanks to this lesson. I also realized that Finnish and Turkish are pretty similar languages. Trying to learn the language of the country where I lived for six months was very enjoyable.” (Participant 2, Male, NS / Finland)

“I could never been able to learn Hungarian, but at least trying to learn a new language was nice.” (Participant 1, Female, SK / Hungary)



The overall results show that the contribution of Erasmus experience to the participants' language development was mostly related to their speaking skills. Most of the participants stated that the Erasmus context enabled them to use English in a meaningful context, which resulted in being more fluent and self-confident English speakers. They also gained awareness about various accents, learned to think English and had a chance to learn the language of their host country.

#### **4.2.4. RQ4: What are the contributions of Erasmus exchange program to prospective EFL teachers' social development?**

As displayed in Table 9, the most frequently cited contribution of Erasmus program to the participants' social development was "Adaptation to new social environments" with 26 times (32,5) followed by "Forming international friendships" with 23 times (28,7%), "Opportunities for recreational activities" with 22 times (27,5), and finally "Having fun and taking up new hobbies" with 9 times (11,3%).

Table 9

*Findings on the Social Development of prospective EFL teachers who participated in the Erasmus program*

<b>Main Theme</b>	<b>Sub-Themes</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Social Development</b>	Adaptation to new environments	26	32,5
	Forming international friendships	23	28,7
	Opportunities for recreational activities	22	27,5
	Having fun and taking up new hobbies	9	11,3
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>

Among four sub-themes identified in the data, the most prevalent one was "**adaptation to new environments**". The participants stated that they had been in a completely different context for the first time in their life, which made them better able to adapt to new environments. For example, one participant commented on the people in a new context as follows:

"I was curious about Finland's culture, everything was different for me. The people tend to live isolated but there is not a problem with the friendships. They may seem aloof at first, but they are very good people. I was invited to the dinner by my Finnish friends a few times. Their parents behaved as if I was their child. Consequently, my adaptation got easier." (Participant 2, Male, NS / Finland)

Another participant stated,

“During the Erasmus program, I was in a completely different environment. I not only went abroad and travelled, but also lived there. Thanks to this experience, now it is easier for me to adapt to new contexts.” (Participant 6, Male, ÖCU / Hungary)

The other participant touched upon her adaptation to a new weather condition,

“I started to worry about the weather of Finland even before I went there. Finland is a northern country and my school was in a quite cold region. Since I’m not used to cold weather, I was nervous about it. It took me a while until I got used to the climate. No matter how challenging it may seem, being able to adapt to differences is a valuable life experience.” (Participant 9, Female, SB / Finland)

The second most prevalent theme was observed to be “**forming international friendships**”. Throughout the Erasmus program, the participants had a chance to meet people from different cultures and they made a lot of friends. They stated that the student hostels, the activities and parties created a suitable social context for making international friends.

One of the participants said,

“I did not have any difficulty in socialization and forming new friendships. I was sharing a flat with seven students and all of them were from a different country. There were a lot of Erasmus students in Budapest. Every day there were activities and parties. We travelled to Poland with my Brazilian friends and I visited my Polish friends living there. It was amazing!” (Participant 1, Female, SK / Hungary)

Another participant commented on forming international friendships during ESN events:

“There was a group of voluntary students who organized activities every day. The name of the group was ESN (Erasmus Student Network). Thanks to those activities I made many friends from different countries. We got on well with each other and I did not have a socialization problem at all.” (Participant 8, Female, ZÖ / Poland)

Another participant mentioned the multicultural environment in his flat:

“The flat where I stayed was like a hostel. Nearly twenty students were staying in the same flat. In such a place, it was impossible not to form international friendships. I had friends from various countries such as Albania, India, Italy, France...” (Participant 6, Male, ÖCU / Hungary)

The third most prevalent theme was “**opportunities for recreational activities**”. The participants stated that they had a chance to join a variety of activities such as hiking, concerts, parties, sightseeing tours during their Erasmus mobility.

Below is a quote from a participant who went to many concerts:

“I’m interested in music and I had a chance to go to a few concerts of local bands. Instead of travelling, I preferred to spend my money for the concerts. I went to nearly thirty concerts in Budapest.” (Participant 7, Male, MK / Hungary)

Another participant commented on the activities she enjoyed:

“I joined many different activities: Welcome parties, sightseeing tours, hiking, Halloween parties... In an activity, we walked around the city, collected the garbages, and took photos. I had never joined so many activities before!” (Participant 9, Female, SB / Finland)

The last major theme identified in the data was “**having fun and taking up new hobbies**”. The results revealed that the participants had a lot of fun during the social activities and some of them even took up a new hobby. For example, one participant stated that he learned how to play the guitar:

“As I said before, I love music. In a concert I met some people who worked in a record company. I spent most of my time with them. We went to the concerts, and I helped them hang their posters. I learned how to play the guitar there! It was so much fun.” (Participant 7, Male, MK / Hungary)

Another participant mentioned the cooking workshop she enjoyed:

“I had a great time thanks to the activities organized by the ESN. The Christmas parties and musical shows were amazing! Once I joined a cooking workshop. Everybody cooked meals, socialized, and had fun. I enjoyed cooking a lot. It may be my new hobby!” (Participant 3, Female, TÇ / Belgium)

The overall results show that the participants perceive their Erasmus experience as a great opportunity to socialize in a multicultural context, join many activities and have fun; but especially adaptation to new environments was the most important contribution to their social development.

#### 4.2.5. RQ5: What are the contributions of Erasmus exchange program to prospective EFL teachers' cultural development?

Table 10 displays the 6 sub-themes which emerged from the participants' remarks concerning the contributions of Erasmus program to their cultural development. As can be seen, "Gaining knowledge about various cultures and lifestyles" and "Gaining a broader perception towards various cultures" appear to be the most frequently cited contributions regarding the cultural development with 22 times (22,7%). These sub-themes are followed by "Idea of being a global citizen" with 19 times (19,6%), "Learning about the cuisine, religious and national festivals of various cultures" with 18 times (18,6), "Learning about the history, geography, and international relations of the different countries" with 14 times (14,4%), and "Opportunity to introduce the native culture" with only 2 times (2,1%).

Table 10

*Findings on the Cultural Development of prospective EFL teachers who participated in the Erasmus program*

Main Theme	Sub-Themes	F	%
<b>Cultural Development</b>	Gaining knowledge about various cultures and lifestyles	22	22,7
	Gaining a broader perception towards various cultures	22	22,7
	Idea of being a global citizen	19	19,6
	Learning about the cuisine, religious and national festivals of various cultures	18	18,6
	Learning about the history, geography and international relations of different countries	14	14,4
	Opportunity to introduce the native culture	2	2,1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>97</b>	<b>100</b>

As the analysis of the data gathered from the survey and the semi-structured interview was considered, it was revealed that after "personal development", "cultural development" was the second most important contribution of Erasmus program to prospective EFL teachers. Among six sub-themes emerged under cultural development, the most prevalent ones were "**gaining knowledge about various cultures and lifestyles**" and "**gaining a broader perception towards various cultures**". Most of the participants made positive comments about the multicultural environment they had been. One participant, for example, expressed her opinions as follows:

"I have always wanted to live abroad and say 'Yes, I lived here, I tried to learn the language of this country'. I was never able to learn Hungarian, though... There are a lot of cultures different from my hometown and I wanted to learn about them. Luckily, I made my dream come true."  
(Participant 1, Female, SK / Hungary)

Another participant stated,

“My accommodation was arranged by the school. I shared a flat with the other international students. By this way, I met new people, learned about their cultures and lifestyles. I could see our similarities and differences as well as their world perspective.” (Participant 9, Female, SB / Finland)

The other participant shared what he learned about Finnish culture:

“I have always been curious about the Nordic countries, their cultures and lifestyles. That’s why, I went to Finland. I learned a lot of things about their culture when I lived there. For example, I learned that they do not use dubbing in the movies. Whether in the cinema or on tv, you can watch a foreign movie only with sub-titles. It was interesting.” (Participant 2, Male, NS / Finland)

The responses of participants indicated that not only studying but also living abroad for six months in the framework of Erasmus program gave them an opportunity to gain a broader perception towards various cultures and lifestyles. In this regard, one participant made the following comment:

“The Erasmus program enabled me not only to travel in Europe but also to live there. Even for six months, living there together with the people from different cultures made me a more open-minded person. I have always been an open-minded person, but now my horizon broadened, I can look from different perspectives.” (Participant 6, Male, ÖCU / Hungary)

Another participant explained his ideas as follows:

“The biggest contribution of Erasmus program to my life is having broader point of view towards various cultures. Travelling to different countries, living with the people from different cultures was a great experience. Even my perception towards the cuisine of a country have changed. I think this is something valuable.” (Participant 2, Male, NS / Finland)

Below is another quote from one participant who did Erasmus in Poland:

“As far as I observed, especially the older people were aloof from the foreigners and I could understand their concern. Poland is a country which had gone through hard times. That’s why they stood aloof from the foreigners. I always showed them respect and got positive results.” (Participant 4, Female, NM / Poland)

Next most prevalent sub-theme was identified to be **“idea of being a global citizen”**. The utterances of the participants indicated that they started to feel like a global citizen as a result of studying and living abroad, forming international friendships, experiencing various cultures and lifestyles. The following sample interview response illustrates this situation:

“Throughout my Erasmus experience, I had many friends from France, China, America, England, Africa... I realized that all we are global citizens of the World. No matter which country we come from, we are just humans sharing the same planet, experiencing the same emotions...” (Participant 9, Female, SB / Finland)

Another participant explained his ideas by the example of COVID-19:

“My world view has changed considerably. I realized that the World was smaller than I thought. Corona virus is a good example for this. The first COVID-19 case was reported in China, but it rapidly spread to the whole world. Although we seem to be far from China, we are all close to each other.” (Participant 10, Male, AŞ / Lithuania)

**“Learning about the cuisine, religious and national festivals of various cultures”** was another sub-theme emerged under cultural development. The results showed that the prospective EFL teachers were happy about learning the cuisine and the important festivals of different cultures. They commented on the cultural activities and ceremonies they attended during their Erasmus mobility. For instance, one participant mentioned a national ceremony she attended in Finland:

“Every year on December 6, Finland celebrates the Independence Day. I had a chance to join a ceremony where the people carried a torch. I will always remember that day.” (Participant 9, Female, SB / Finland)

Similarly, another participant reflected that;

“Our school organized a big cultural activity. Everybody wore clothes reflecting their culture and walked in the city. In another activity, we cooked our cultural dishes and tasted them. I gained deeper knowledge about various cultures thanks to those activities.” (Participant 3, Female, TÇ / Belgium)

Another common sub-theme emerged from the data was **“learning about the history, geography and international relations of different countries”**. The remarks of the participants showed that the Erasmus exchange program enabled them to gain deeper knowledge about the history, geography and international relations of different countries. They mostly commented on what they had learned from travelling in European cities, visiting museums, and the history courses. The following expressions exemplify the perceptions of the participants:

“In one of our courses, I learned about the history of Finland and gained valuable knowledge about the country. Especially during the wartime period they had gone through many difficulties.” (Participant 2, Male, NS / Finland)

“Throughout the time I was there, I travelled to all European cities. I enjoy reading about the geography, international relations and history of the countries, but being physically in those places and learning by experiencing was much more fascinating.” (Participant 5, Female, SO / Belgium)

The last major sub-theme identified in the data was **“opportunity to introduce the native culture”**. Two of the participants touched upon the activities and events where they had a chance to introduce Turkish culture and their hometown. The results showed that the multicultural environment in the Erasmus program allowed the participants not only to learn about different cultures, but also to represent their own culture. The following sample interview responses illustrate the experiences of two participants on this issue:

“I made a presentation about Turkey in a course. Most of the students know about Istanbul, but some of them heard of Izmir for the first time. Even after Erasmus, my Brazilian friend came to Turkey to visit me. I guided him during our travels in Istanbul and Izmir. I was very happy for this experience.” (Participant 1, Female, SK / Hungary)

“...During the cooking workshop organized by the ESN, we cooked dishes that reflect our cultures. I cooked a Turkish dish, everybody tasted and liked it. It felt good to be there, learn about different cultures, and introduce my own culture as well.” (Participant 3, Female, TÇ / Belgium)

Overall, the frequencies revealed that after “personal development”(f=159), “cultural development”(f=97) was the second most attended contribution of Erasmus exchange program to Turkish prospective EFL teachers. Most of the participants believed that the Erasmus experience had a positive impact on their cultural development. The most frequently mentioned cultural gains were learning about various cultures and lifestyles as well as gaining a broader perception towards various cultures and the idea of being a global citizen. However, it can be argued that the participants’ cultural gains differ based upon how they spent their time

throughout the mobility period. Finally, it should be noted that the survey results also corroborated the interview findings presented in this section.

#### 4.2.6. RQ6: What are the contributions of Erasmus exchange program to prospective EFL teachers' personal development?

The number of citations regarding "Personal Development" is noteworthy (159 times). As it is seen in Table 11, 12 sub-themes emerged under this theme. The contributions of Erasmus program to the personal development of prospective EFL teachers are as follows: "Learning how to cope with challenges" with 19 times (11,9), "Gaining survival skills" and "Self-realization" with 17 times (10,7%), "Being open to differences", "Sense of being able to succeed", and "Stepping outside of comfort zone" with 16 times (10,1%), "Self-confidence" with 14 times (8,8%), "Gaining a broader perception" with 13 times (8,2%), "Being eager to take more responsibilities" with 12 times (7,5%), "Developing leadership skills such as planning, decision making, empowerment, self-disciplin, tolerance, respect, empathy etc." with 9 times (5,7%), "Being more patient under uncertain circumstances" with 6 times (3,8%) and finally, "Learning how to use limited money" with 4 times (2,5%).

Table 11

*Findings on the Personal Development of prospective EFL teachers who participated in the Erasmus program*

Main Theme	Sub-Themes	F	%
<b>Personal Development</b>	Learning how to cope with challenges	19	11,9
	Gaining survival skills	17	10,7
	Self-realization	17	10,7
	Being open to differences	16	10,1
	Sense of being able to succeed	16	10,1
	Stepping outside of comfort zone	16	10,1
	Self-confidence	14	8,8
	Gaining a broader perception	13	8,2
	Being eager to take more responsibilities	12	7,5
	Developing leadership skills	9	5,7
	Being more patient under uncertain circumstances	6	3,8
	Learning how to use limited money	4	2,5
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>159</b>	<b>100</b>



Regarding the personal development, it was revealed that the interview findings were in line with the survey results which was illustrated before. Most of the participants stated that the biggest contribution of Erasmus program was to their personal development. Twelve sub-themes emerged under this theme. The most prevalent one was **“learning how to cope with challenges”**. The participants state that they needed to deal with a lot of tasks and to solve the problems they faced throughout the process and as a result of the difficulties, they learned how to cope with challenges.

One participant explained her ideas as follows:

“By means of the Erasmus program, I learned how to cope with challenges. I felt stressed and confused from time to time, it wasn’t an easy road. Nevertheless, it was a great opportunity to mature, improve my problem-solving skills, and grow up.” (Participant 1, Female, SK / Hungary)

Another participant mentioned how she achieved her goal:

“Of course I encountered some difficulties, but instead of giving up, I always reminded myself that this experience would come to an end and the difficulties I faced would worth it. Isn’t it the same with the life itself? I achieved my goal by coping with the challenges and doing my best.” (Participant 5, Female, SO / Belgium)

Lastly, one participant stated that she was grateful for learning how to cope with challenges:

“When I arrived in my host country, there were a lot of things I needed to deal with. There were documents that I needed to submit, but I did not know where to go. I felt confused at some points. At the end, I was more able to cope with challenges. I feel grateful for this.” (Participant 9, Female, SB / Finland)

Next most prevalent themes were **“gaining survival skills”** and **“self-realization”**. Most of the participants had to carry out the tasks such as applying for visa, collecting documents, paying the rent and bills, doing house work, shopping, managing their account for the first time in their life. Since their responsibility increased during the Erasmus mobility, they ended up gaining those survival skills.

One participant shared her experience as follows:

“Trying to find accommodation, signing the rental contract, paying the bills, getting a resident permit... It was the first time needed to deal with these tasks. It was stressful, but learned valuable survival skills, which I appreciate.” (Participant 1, Female, SK / Hungary)

Another participant commented on gaining knowledge about the visa procedure,

“Visa procedure was the most stressful period for me. I had never been abroad before, and I did not know anything about how to apply for visa, which documents to collect... Now I know everything about the procedure. I wouldn't have learned such detailed information without this experience.” (Participant 8, Female, ZÖ / Poland)

A quote from another participant is as follows:

“During the program, we also change our lifestyle. Suddenly, our responsibilities increase and we are the only person to handle them. Apart from studying abroad, I had to pay the bills, do shopping, cook... In a sense, I created my own world.” (Participant 9, Female, SB / Finland)

The participants' remarks also revealed that their Erasmus experience created opportunities for **self-realization**. They stated that they realized their potential, desire, and dreams. One participant, for example, commented,

“... I discovered myself at the same time. I realized what I really want, what I'm capable of doing and what I cannot do.” (Participant 1, Female, SK / Hungary)

Another participant mentioned that she realized her potential to take responsibility:

“Before my Erasmus experience, I did not know that I was a responsible person. When I had to live abroad on my own, I realized that I had much more capacity than I had thought.” (Participant 8, Female, ZÖ / Poland)

The other participant focused on the realization of her future plans:

“Having a chance to live in a European country made me think of my future plans. I imagined myself living the cities which I travelled to and better understood what kind of a life I want to make for myself.” (Participant 5, Female, SO / Belgium)

Next most prevalent themes were “**being open to differences**”, “**sense of being able to succeed**”, and “**stepping outside of comfort zone**”. The findings indicate that after they lived and studied in a different country, the participants were open to differences during their daily life as well.

For example, one participant commented on this issue as follows:

“When I applied the Erasmus program, I thought ‘Life gives me an opportunity and I should make the most of it’. At the end of the program, I

better understood that I should be open to different opportunities and at least try my chance. No matter how it ends up, I would do it again.” (Participant 1, Female, SK / Hungary)

Another participant pointed out that she felt more encouraged to try new things:

“Before I went to Poland, I was feeling worried. If I have this chance again, I will probably not worry at all. I feel more encouraged to try new things now.” (Participant 4, Female, NM / Poland)

The responses of participants indicated that most were proud of themselves as a result of the things they had succeeded throughout the Erasmus mobility.

One participant mentioned the increase in her self-belief,

“When I saw that I was able to succeed in living and studying abroad on my own, my self-belief increased and I felt better as a result of the good performance I showed.” (Participant 9, Female, SB / Finland)

Another participant stated,

“I achieved the things that I couldn’t imagine before. I saw that I had much more potential. Even if I struggled sometimes, the feeling of success at the end was great!” (Participant 3, Female, TÇ / Belgium)

The findings showed that according to some participants, stepping outside of comfortzone is a must to take the first step and apply for the Erasmus program. They stated that after this experience it became easier to step out of comfortzone in every part of their life.

One participant explained her ideas as follows:

“Actually, many people are stuck at their comfort zone. I’m also one of these people. I want to travel abroad a lot, but it seems so daunting at first that I do not want to do anything. Once I showed the courage to step outside of my comfort zone, I could have a life changing experience.” (Participant 1, Female, SK / Hungary)

Another participant mentioned that she started to challenge herself to leave her comfort zone:

“The people who find it difficult to be far from their family for 6 months should keep in mind that it’s an adventure which can be experienced just once or twice in the life. After this adventure, I tend to exert myself to step outside of my comfort zone in every situation.” (Participant 8, Female, ZÖ / Poland)

Another common theme emerged from the data was **“self-confidence”**. As can be understood from the participants’ remarks presented below; as a result of living, studying abroad, and accomplishing many things during the Erasmus program, their self-confidence increased considerably.

For example, one participant commented,

“Accomplishing the things such as getting a residence permit, paying the bills and rent, trying to communicate with the foreign people made me feel more self-confident. Certainly, the people who participate in the Erasmus program have an increased self-confidence.” (Participant 1, Female, SK / Hungary)

Another participant who used to perceive herself as a timid person stated,

“I used to be a coward person. I was afraid of even getting on the bus alone, as an example. Thanks to this experience, I have travelled by plane for the first time! Even that was a big accomplishment for me to feel more self-confident.” (Participant 8, Female, ZÖ / Poland)

Next sub-theme under the theme of personal development was **“gaining a broader perception”**. The results revealed that the Erasmus experience enabled the participants to develop a new perception towards the world and their life.

Below is a quote from a participant who commented on the change in his world-view:

“Erasmus program contributed to my personal development by changing my perception. My world-view has changed. I mean, I realized the things that seem to be impossible are actually attainable when you give effort.” (Participant 10, Male, AŞ / Lithuania)

Another participant pointed out that,

“The most valuable contribution of this program to my personality is that it shaped my character and broadened my horizon. Even for six months, living abroad and observing different lifestyles made me develop a point of view.” (Participant 2, Male, NS / Finland)

Another theme identified in the data was **“being eager to take more responsibilities”**. The findings indicated that the participants felt more mature after they took and accomplished many responsibilities during the Erasmus mobility, which encouraged them to take many other responsibilities in their life.

Below is a quote from two of the participants:

“Before my Erasmus experience, I did not use to be a responsible person. When I lived abroad on my own, I saw that I was a person who can take responsibility, which encouraged me to take more responsibilities even after I came back to my hometown.” (Participant 8, Female, ZÖ / Poland)

“Now I feel like I’m more mature personally. I turned out to be a more responsible person when suddenly everything was under my responsibility: Paying the bills and rent, doing the housework, studying abroad and doing homework...” (Participant 9, Female, SB / Finland)

Next prevalent theme was observed to be **“developing leadership skills”**. The responses of participants revealed that they developed leadership skills such as tolerance, respect, empathy, planning, decision making, and self-disciplin as a result of attending the Erasmus exchange program.

One participant commented on her increased empathy:

“My tolerance and respect towards the people increased. I was already a respectful person, but I think I show more empathy towards people now.” (Participant 9, Female, SB / Finland)

Another participant mentioned the planning skills he had developed:

“In my visa procedure, many problems occurred and consequently the accommodation problems followed. Immediately after being accepted to the Erasmus program, it is necessary to plan the visa, passport, accommodation procedures. Even before going abroad, you start to develop planning, decision making, and self-disciplin skills.” (Participant 7, Male, MK / Hungary)

Next most prevalent theme was **“being more patient under uncertain circumstances”**. Some participants stated that they used to feel more stressed, impatient and discouraged under uncertain circumstances; but it had changed after their Erasmus experience which was full of possibilities and uncertainties.

Below is a quote from one of the participants:

“Compared to the past, I feel more relaxed and calm under uncertain circumstances. I used to be impatient and try to control everything. This process taught me to be patient and go with the flow. When I try new things I’m calmer and more patient now.” (Participant 1, Female, SK / Hungary)

Another participant commented,

“...of course there were times when I felt discouraged and stressed, but I learned to stay calm and be patient.” (Participant 3, Female, TÇ / Belgium)

The last major theme identified in the data was “**learning how to use limited money**”. The extracts of the participants showed that living and studying abroad for six months as a student was challenging financially in spite of receiving grant. As a result, some participants stated that they learned to spend their money wisely.

One participant expressed his ideas as below:

“Although the grant supported a small part of my needs, it was not enough for all my expenses. As a result, I had to learn how to manage my account and use limited money. Though it was difficult, now I can make wiser decisions when I spend money.” (Participant 10, Male, AŞ / Lithuania)

Overall, it can be argued that almost all participants considered the personal development to be the most important contribution of the Erasmus exchange program. Both the survey and the interview findings corroborate their remarks. According to the survey results which was illustrated before, 89,2% of the participant thought that the Erasmus program had the biggest effect on their personal development. Also the interview findings presented in this section were in line with the survey results. They believed that the personal gains such as learning how to cope with challenges, developing survival skills, and realizing their potentials would be helpful for them through their life.

#### **4.2.7. RQ7: What are the contributions of Erasmus exchange program to prospective EFL teachers’ career development?**

As for the career development, 6 sub-themes emerged as illustrated in Table 12. Under this main theme, 67 turns were provided and 20 (30%) of these turns were “Learning about various education systems, language teaching methods and techniques” followed by 16 turns (24%) of “Having a chance to compare different education systems” and “Feeling more self-confident in making future plans”. There were also 10 turns (15%) of “Job opportunities in Turkey and abroad”, 3 turns (4%) of “Openness to different job opportunities” and 2 turns (3%) of “Opportunities for internship”.

Table 12

*Findings on the Career Development of prospective EFL teachers who participated in the Erasmus program*

Main Theme	Sub-Themes	F	%
<b>Career Development</b>	Learning about various education systems, language teaching methods and techniques	20	30
	Having a chance to compare different education systems	16	24
	Feeling more self-confident in making future plans	16	24
	Job opportunities in Turkey and abroad	10	15
	Openness to different job opportunities	3	4
	Opportunities for internship	2	3
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>67</b>	<b>100</b>

Among six sub-themes emerged under career development, the most prevalent one was observed to be **“learning about various education systems, language teaching methods and techniques”**. The extracts of the prospective EFL teachers who participated in the Erasmus exchange program indicated that they believed the various language teaching methods and activities they learned during their mobility to be beneficial for their teaching career in the future.

For example, one participant reflected his ideas as below:

“Being able to observe European education system closely will probably affect my teaching style when I become a teacher. I want to use the techniques I learned there. When something is learned by discovering rather than memorizing, it will be more memorable I believe.” (Participant 2, Male, NS / Finland)

Another participant commented,

“Theoretical and applied courses were equally important in my host university. Applied courses were much more beneficial for me. I learned many different language teaching activities. I think the teachers also know that the students have difficulty in concentrating on the theoretical courses after a few minutes.” (Participant 3, Female, TÇ / Belgium)

One participant stated that she was inspired by new teaching methods and techniques:

“The education system of Finland was completely different from Turkey. We had extensive research homework. I learned various language teaching methods and techniques from my research. When I prepare lesson plans, I will definitely inspire from the things I learned there. (Participant 9, Female, SB / Finland)

On the other hand, one participant stated that the language teaching methods and techniques adopted in his host university were not different or inspiring, and he did not believe the Erasmus experience would make any contribution to his future career. His utterances on this issue are as follows:

“I took courses from five different teachers. The methods they used were similar to what I saw in Turkey, so I think there wasn’t an extra contribution of the program to my career.” (Participant 7, Male, MK / Hungary)

Next most prevalent sub-themes were observed to be **“having a chance to compare different education systems”** and **“feeling more self-confident in making future plans”**. The analysis of the data revealed that the participants believed that the Erasmus program enabled them to make comparisons between different education systems. One of the participants stated,

“I definitely think that the Erasmus experience will contribute positively to my career. I had a chance to study in a European context and make comparison between different education systems thanks to this program. By this way I believe, I will better be able to adopt teaching methods suitable for my students.” (Participant 5, Female, SO / Belgium)

Another participant commented on taking the same courses through different methods:

“I registered for nine courses from the ELT department. Even if I already took most of those courses in my first year at university, it was nice to compare the teaching ways of the same lesson. I think being taught with various instructions will help me develop in my career.” (Participant 8, Female, ZÖ / Poland)

The responses of participants indicated that most began to feel more self-confident while making future plans. As it can be understood clearly from their excerpts presented below, the participants seemed eager to make future plans suitable for themselves and achieve their goals. One participant, for example, mentioned how self-confident he began to feel to take action after the Erasmus exchange experience:

“I have been dreaming of studying or working abroad for a long time. After this experience, I can say that I really would like to participate in the Erasmus program again if I’m accepted to do master degree. If it’s possible, doing master degree abroad would be great! I was always thinking about it, but now I feel more self-confident to take action.” (Participant 6, Male, ÖCU / Hungary)



Another participant commented on her future plans as below:

“Although I’m an ELT student, I was still unsure about my future plans. Now I know better what I really want to do. If I can do, I want to do master degree in Finland. My parents are academicians and they always support and encourage us. Maybe I will stay there and continue my studies with a doctorate in ELT. This would be great for my future.” (Participant 9, Female, SB / Finland)

Another sub-theme emerged under career development was identified to be “**job opportunities in Turkey and abroad**”. The results indicated that the participants believed their Erasmus experience would enable them to find a good job not only in Turkey but also abroad. The following student scripts illustrate their opinions on this issue:

“Whether you try to find a job in Turkey or abroad, having a studying abroad experience on the CV creates a difference I think.” (Participant 2, Male, NS / Finland)

“My biggest dream has been being a successful English teacher. That’s why, I have been giving a great effort to improve myself in terms of language and career. I think the Erasmus program will help me realize my dream. Maybe I can work as an English teacher abroad, who knows...” (Participant 5, Female, SO / Belgium)

“**Openness to different job opportunities**” was another sub-theme identified under career development. Although most of the participants were planning to be a teacher of English, there were also a few students who discovered their different interests. One participant who was interested in tourism reflected her ideas as follows:

“I discovered my different interests in terms of career. I still want to be an English teacher, but I also want to turn towards tourism. I’m planning to study Tourism Guidance in the following years. By this way, maybe I can work as a tourist guide abroad. I was happy to discover my new interests.” (Participant 4, Female, NM / Poland)

The last major theme identified in the data was **“opportunities for internship”**. Two of the participants touched upon the internship opportunities in their host university. They stated that having a chance to teach English abroad made them feel more self-confident as prospective EFL teachers. The extracts of those two participants are presented below:

“My classmates in Poland had already started to do internship when they were second-year students. Actually, I liked it. I think we can also start our internship a little earlier. Doing internship abroad was a great opportunity for me. To be honest, I see myself ahead of my classmates in Turkey in terms of teaching experience.” (Participant 8, Female, ZÖ / Poland)

“As part of a school project, I went to a primary school in Finland and observed the 5th graders during their English lessons. It was a kind of internship and I feel lucky to have this experience.” (Participant 9, Female, SB / Finland)

The overall results indicate that the participants’ perceptions towards the contribution of Erasmus experience to their career development differ based on the practices in their host university as well as their goals and future plans. It can be argued that the Erasmus exchange program created the least impact on academic and career development of prospective EFL teachers. Although some participants were inspired by the European education context and career prospects, the contributions were not as many as of personal and cultural development. Both the survey results and the semi-structured interview results were in line with each other in this regard.

#### **4.2.8. RQ8: Do prospective EFL teachers encounter any problems during the Erasmus process?**

Table 13

*Results on whether the participants had any problems in the Erasmus process*

	<b>I had a lot of problems</b>		<b>I had some problems</b>		<b>I had a few problems</b>		<b>I never had problems</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Did you have any problems in the Erasmus process ?	16	43,2	12	32,4	8	21,6	1	2,8

The results on whether the participants encountered any problems during the Erasmus process are illustrated in Table 13 above and Figure 6 below. Accordingly, nearly half of the participants (43,2%) stated that they had a lot of problems. Only one participant (2,8%) said that he never had problems.

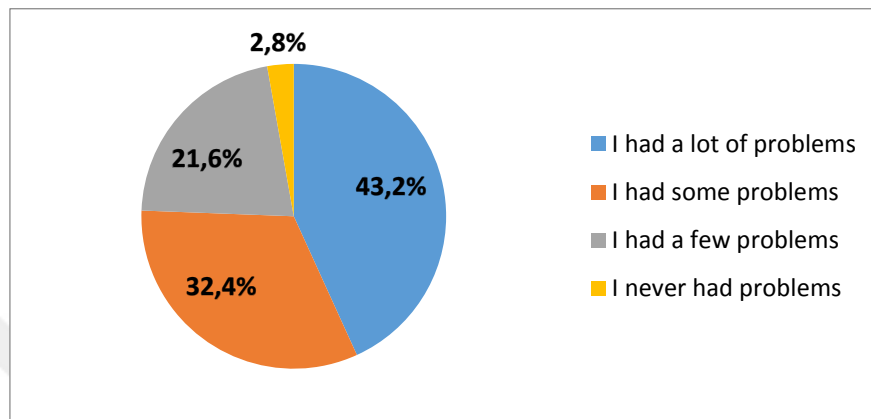


Figure 6. Results on whether the participants had any problems in the Erasmus process

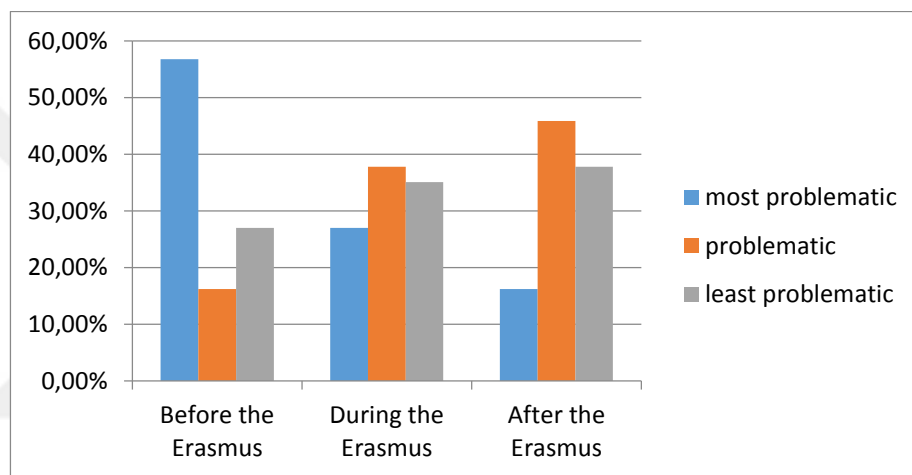
#### 4.2.9. RQ9: In which period (before, during, or after the Erasmus) do prospective EFL teachers have the most problems?

Table 14

*The Erasmus periods in which the participants encountered the most problems*

	1 most problematic		2 problematic		3 least problematic	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Before the Erasmus	21	56,8	6	16,2	10	27
During the Erasmus	10	27	14	37,8	13	35,1
After the Erasmus	6	16,2	17	45,9	14	37,8

When the result of the previous research question is examined, it is clear that the prospective EFL teachers encountered many problems throughout the Erasmus process. When it comes to the periods (before, during, or after Erasmus) in which the participants had the most problems, the vast majority of the participants (56,8%) had more problems before Erasmus as seen in Table 14 and Figure 7. According to 27% of the participants, the most problematic period was “during Erasmus” while 35,1% stated it was the least problematic period. Nearly half of the participants (45,9) stated that “after the Erasmus” period was problematic while 14 participants (37,8%) thought it was the least problematic period.



*Figure 7.* Results on the periods in which the participants encountered the most problems

#### **4.2.10. RQ10: What type of problems do prospective EFL teachers encounter in each period of the Erasmus process?**

The deeper knowledge about the type of problems encountered by the prospective EFL teachers was gained through the the semi-structured interview and open-ended questions in the survey. In this part of the study, the results on the type of problems encountered by the participants in the pre-Erasmus, during Erasmus and post-Erasmus process are presented in detail.

#### 4.2.10.1. The Problems in the Pre-Erasmus Process

Table 15 displays the 7 sub-themes which emerged from the participants' remarks concerning the problems they encountered in the pre-Erasmus process. As can be seen, "Lack of information and insufficient guidance" is the most frequently mentioned problem in the pre-Erasmus period with 16 turns (25%) followed by 12 turns (18,75%) of "Paper work", 12 turns (18,75%) of "Finding equivalent courses and preparation of Learning Agreement", 11 turns (17,19%) of "Visa procedure", 6 turns (9,38%) of "Communication problem between the host and sending institution", 4 turns (6,25%) of "Finding accommodation" and finally 3 turns (4,69%) of "Financial problems".

Table 15

*Findings on the problems encountered by prospective EFL teachers before the Erasmus program*

	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
Lack of information and insufficient guidance	16	25
Paper work	12	18,75
Finding equivalent courses and preparation of Learning Agreement	12	18,75
Visa procedure	11	17,19
Communication problem between the host and sending institution	6	9,38
Finding accommodation	4	6,25
Financial Problems	3	4,69
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>100</b>

The most prevalent theme was observed to be "**lack of information and insufficient guidance**". The participants stated that they had difficulty due to the insufficient guidance and they couldn't obtain reliable information about the things they were supposed to do. One participant commented on this issue as follows:

"However rewarding the Erasmus experience was, the preparation period before the mobility was extremely stressful. I did not know exactly what I needed to do and it was difficult to find reliable information on the internet. Everything seemed very complicated. I wish I could have been informed and guided better." (Participant 1, Female, SK / Hungary)

Another participant stated,

"I had difficulty due to the lack of information about the Erasmus procedure. Everything seemed to be daunting at first. Unfortunately, I couldn't receive enough information from my school." (Participant 3, Female, TÇ / Belgium)

The other participant mentioned the complexity of the procedure:

“Nearly everything seemed to be difficult at this process. I was always in touch with my Erasmus coordinator and running after her to consult something about the documents, but she was busy and couldn’t get involved with the whole process.” (Participant 4, Female, NM / Poland)

Below is a quote from another participant:

“Since the website of my host university was old, I couldn’t obtain reliable information about the documents I needed to prepare. The instructions were not clear, so I always had to call someone and ask questions. I learned that a student certificate was necessary at the last minute.” (Participant 7, Male, MK / Hungary)

Next most prevalent themes were **“paper work”** and **“finding equivalent courses and preparation of learning agreement”**. Nearly all of the participants stated that it was quite stressful to deal with excessive paper work.

For example, one participant stated,

“Dealing with the paper work was stressful. The documents I collected were as thick as a book. Completing the necessary signatures also took a long time.” (Participant 2, Male, NS / Finland)

Another participant mentioned a problem related to the delay in the signature of the documents:

“The biggest problem I encountered was related to paper work: the signature of my documents was delayed and I couldn’t go abroad on time just because of this.” (Participant 7, Male, MK / Hungary)

Below is a quote from two of the participants:

“Paper work was very daunting in general. Filling in the documents, sending these documents to the host university, waiting for an answer from them, informing my home university about the result were all challenging tasks for me.” (Participant 4, Female, NM / Poland)

“In my opinion, the hardest period of the Erasmus is before the mobility, when we need to deal with the documents and paper work. Even living there was easier than the formal procedure.” (Participant 8, Female, ZÖ / Poland)

The responses of participants indicated that almost all of them were confused while preparing the learning agreement. They had difficulty in finding equivalent courses which they could match with the courses in their home university. The following comments were made by a participant who touched upon the differences in the curriculum of two institutions:

“Finding equivalent courses was not an easy task. When I read the course catalog I saw some differences between the ELT curriculum of Turkey and Finland. For instance, the Music, Art, and Physical Education classes are compulsory for the prospective EFL teachers in Finland. I loved it, but I did not take these courses since it might have created problems in matching the courses.” (Participant 9, Female, SB / Finland)

Another participant stated,

“I needed to prepare the Learning Agreement very carefully. It was tiring to find equivalent courses, match their credits, and avoid any conflict in the timetable.” (Participant 1, Female, SK / Hungary)

The other participant mentioned a problem related to the delay in course selection:

“The online system of my host university was different and confusing. I should have registered for the courses in July, but I did not know it. The Finnish students had already made course selection. Since maximum 20 students were allowed to register for one course, I couldn't find a vacancy. I managed to solve the problem, but this system made me tired.” (Participant 2, Male, NS / Finland)

Similarly, another participant reflected that;

“Preparing the learning agreement was an intimidating process. The course catalog of my host university was full of details and I had difficulty in finding suitable courses that I could match the credits. Since there wasn't any information about the ECTS of the courses in the catalog, I had to make some changes in the learning agreement afterwards.” (Participant 8, Female, ZÖ / Poland)

Another common theme emerged under “the problems in the pre-Erasmus process” was “**visa procedure**”. The analysis of the data revealed that most of the participants had various problems during the visa procedure. As Turkish citizens, they needed to have a visa to go abroad and they were supposed to collect a lot of documents which varied by the country where they would go. Furthermore, some students had to go to a different city in Turkey just to apply for the visa. It can be clearly understood from the extracts below that it was a stressful process for the participants. The following sample interview response illustrates this situation:

“The visa procedure was extremely difficult for me. It was the first time I had to apply for visa, so everything seemed to be complicated. Moreover, the regulations had changed when I made application. Consequently, I could receive the visa twenty days before my departure. I felt stressed until the last moment.” (Participant 8, Female, ZÖ / Poland)

Another participant mentioned his experience as follows:

“It was a stressful period. I was late for making passport and visa application. I live in Izmir, but I had to go to Ankara to apply for the visa. I waited for a long time and finally, I had to go to Ankara again to obtain the visa and take my passport back.” (Participant 6, Male, ÖCU / Hungary)

One participant started his mobility later than planned due to the delay of the visa:

“It is crucial to plan the passport and visa procedure immediately after being accepted to the Erasmus program. In my case, some problems occurred related to visa followed by the troubles in accommodation and plane ticket. Moreover, due to the delay of my visa, I arrived in Budapest later than planned.” (Participant 7, Male, MK / Hungary)

Below is a quote from another participant who encountered similar problems:

“Although I had been abroad before, it took a long time to obtain the visa. It was horrible! Just because of the delay of the visa, I started my mobility one month later than planned. I could have lost the right to benefit from the program since I was late. Fortunately, it did not happen.” (Participant 5, Female, SO / Belgium)

Another problem encountered in the pre-Erasmus process was observed to be “**communication problem between the host and sending institution**”. The results showed that some students had difficulty in establishing the communication between two institutions, which made it more difficult to prepare the learning agreement and collect the necessary documents and signatures.



Below is an excerpt from one participant who shared her experience on this issue:

“Especially during the preparation of the necessary documents, it was difficult and confusing to follow the directions of my host and home university at the same time.” (Participant 4, Female, NM / Poland)

Another participant mentioned that there wasn't ELT department in his host university:

“One of my teachers advised me not to do Erasmus due to the fact that my host university did not have ELT department. It is weird that the school made an agreement with a university which did not have my department. I think they must be more selective about which schools to have an agreement with. Although this situation was a disadvantage, I did not give up because I wanted to gain this experience a lot.” (Participant 7, Male, MK / Hungary)

Lastly, one participant made the following comment:

“When I tried to find equivalent courses, I had to receive the approval of both my host and home university, which was not easy.” (Participant 9, Female, SB / Finland)

“**Finding accommodation**” was another sub-theme emerged under “the problems in the pre-Erasmus process”. The remarks of the participants indicated that while some universities provided many options for accommodation, some universities and cities did not offer student-friendly accommodation alternatives. As a result, there were a few participants who had no permanent accommodation when they arrived in the host country. The following expressions exemplify the participants' problems of finding accommodation:

“There were a few dormitories in Finland and the capacity was limited. Although I applied for a dormitory before I went there, I did not receive a reply and I had no accommodation when I arrived in Finland. I stayed at a hostel until I could find a permanent place.” (Participant 2, Male, NS / Finland)

“Unfortunately, my host university did not have a student dormitory. It was a disadvantage. A friend of mine who was also doing Erasmus in Budapest stayed in an excellent dormitory provided by his school. It was disappointing that our school did not provide us with an accommodation.” (Participant 6, Male, ÖCU / Hungary)

The last major theme identified in the data was “**financial problems**”. The responses of the participants showed that even before going abroad they started to spend money for the preparations such as visa and passport fee, plane ticket, arranging accommodation etc. The participants stated that it was crucial to save some money prior to the mobility. To illustrate, one participant made the utterances below:

“I started spending a considerable amount of money even before I go abroad in order to apply for visa, buy the plane ticket, make a down payment for the accommodation... Therefore, economical difficulties may occur not only during but also before the Erasmus.” (Participant 1, Female, SK / Hungary)

Another participant focused on the importance of saving money before the mobility:

“Living and studying abroad is difficult economically, so I preferred to go to a country where I could have financial comfort. It would be wise to save money prior to mobility in order to be ready for expenses.” (Participant 8, Female, ZÖ / Poland)

Overall, it can be argued that the problems encountered by the prospective EFL teachers in the pre-Erasmus process were mostly related to the formal procedure such as collecting documents and signatures, applying for visa, as well as finding equivalent courses and preparing the learning agreement. Furthermore, they stated that they had to carry out those tasks with a lack of information and insufficient guidance, which was the most frequently mentioned problem by the participants. A few participants also mentioned some difficulties related to establishing the communication between the host and the sending institution, finding accommodation and financial problems; though not as frequently mentioned as the formal procedure. According to the survey results, 56,8% of the participants perceived the pre-Erasmus process as the most problematic period. When the interview findings were taken into consideration, this result could be interpreted in a way that the participants felt stressed throughout the pre-Erasmus process due to the tasks which were unfamiliar and overwhelming for them.

#### 4.2.10.2. The Problems during the Erasmus Process

Table 16

*Findings on the problems encountered by prospective EFL teachers during the Erasmus program*

	F	%
Academic problems	18	18,1
Financial problems	17	17,1
Socialization	11	11,1
Paper work	9	9,1
Accommodation	9	9,1
Climatic conditions	9	9,1
Lack of recreational activities	8	8,1
Mentorship system	5	5,1
Sanitary problems	5	5,1
Language problems	4	4,1
Communication problems with the teachers	2	2,1
Culture shock	1	1,1
Food and drink problems	1	1,1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>100</b>

As illustrated in Table 16, 13 sub-themes emerged under the problems that the participants encountered “during the Erasmus” process. It is seen clearly that the problems encountered during the mobility are more diverse compared to the problems in the “pre-Erasmus” process. Out of 99 turns provided by the participants, the most frequently mentioned problems encountered “during the Erasmus” process were “Academic problems” with 18 times (18,2%) and “Financial problems” with 17 times (17,2%). These are followed by “Socialization” with 11 times (11,1%), “Paper work” with 9 times (9,1%), “Accommodation” with 9 times (9,1%), “Climatic conditions” with 9 times (9,1%), “Lack of recreational activities” with 8 times (8,1%), “Mentorship system” with 5 times (5,1%), “Sanitary problems” with 5 times (5,1%), “Language problems” with 4 times (4,1%), “Communication problems with the teachers” with 2 times (2,1%), and finally “Culture shock”, and “Food and drink problems” with only 1 time (1,1%).

Among thirteen sub-themes identified in the data, “**academic problems**” was the most frequently mentioned problem encountered by the prospective EFL teachers during the Erasmus mobility. Its frequency outnumbered the other sub-themes’ frequency by embracing 18 out of 99 comments. The utterances of the participants revealed that the academic problems encountered during the Erasmus process were mostly due to the fact that some of the host universities did not have ELT department. That’s why, the participants had to take

courses from other departments to match the credits, which was an academic problem for them. The following sample interview response illustrates this situation:

“There were some points that I could not be satisfied with academically, mainly because I was a student of the faculty of literature, not a faculty of education. There was a lack of pedagogical lessons, so I was trained like a philologist because my school could not agree with the Educational Science department of the opposite institution. The teachers were nice but the education was not of good quality” (Participant 7, Male, MK / Hungary)

Two more participants made similar comments regarding the academic problems:

“I could choose only three courses from the ELT department. The other four courses I took were from neuropsychology department, which I did not know anything about. As a result, I failed four courses. It would have been better for me if I had been able to take courses related to ELT.” (Participant 2, Male, NS / Finland)

“I took courses such as Linguistics, Grammar, England & Ireland Culture, but there weren't any pedagogical courses. Because of that, there wasn't an academic contribution in terms of ELT. Moreover, our teachers were in favor of rote learning. I failed one of the courses just because I couldn't remember the place of the countries on the American map.” (Participant 6, Male, ÖCU / Hungary)

Lastly, one participant who had academic problems because of the delay in her arrival in the host country stated that:

“Unavoidably, I couldn't pass one course. As I said before, due to the delay of the visa, I arrived in my host university one month later than planned. Consequently, I couldn't take one course since the teacher said that I failed because of absence. That was the only academic problem I encountered.” (Participant 5, Female, SO / Belgium)

The second most prevalent sub-theme was observed to be **“financial problems”**. The findings indicated that nearly all participants encountered financial problems during their Erasmus mobility. They stated that in spite of receiving a monthly grant, living abroad for six months was not easy financially. One participant, for example, reflected that;

“Finland had higher levels and economically, it was much more expensive than Turkey. The grant I received was insufficient. I spent more than 1000 euros per month, and this could be a disadvantage for the students going without a grant.” (Participant 2, Male, NS / Finland).

Similarly, another participant underlined how insufficient was the grant she received:

“Even though I did not waste much money, the grant wasn’t enough. I received 500 Euro per month since I went to Finland, but my monthly expense was more than 1000 Euro including the rent and bills. Luckily, my family provided economic support, but when we take the economic situation in Turkey into consideration, it was a financial hardship for us.” (Participant 9, Female, SB / Finland)

The other participant explained why he struggled during the Erasmus process:

“The problems ‘before the Erasmus’ process were mostly related to the documents and yes, it was stressful. However, when I think of financial difficulties, ‘during the Erasmus’ process was also struggling. We can receive only 70% of the grant at the beginning and I spent most of that amount for the accommodation.” (Participant 7, Male, MK / Hungary)

A quote from another participant whose flat was burgled during the Erasmus is as follows:

“I had to spend large amount of money for the accommodation since I did not have any other option. Towards the end of my mobility period, the burglar broke into my flat. He stole nearly everything: My laptop, coat, bags, souvenirs, passport, credit cards... I cancelled the credit cards. It was a horrible situation both economically and psychologically.” (Participant 3, Female, TÇ / Belgium)

Another participant who did Erasmus in Belgium stated,

“The fact that I would receive a grant encouraged me at first, but unfortunately it wasn’t enough especially in a country like Belgium. The rent of a 10 square-meter room was nearly 400 Euro, which I couldn’t afford on my own. We rented that room with a friend and shared it together. Otherwise, it would have been impossible to get by in Belgium for six months.” (Participant 5, Female, SO / Belgium)

Next most prevalent sub-theme was identified to be “**socialization**”. The results showed that the participants had some socialization problems due to shyness, prejudices, the type of accommodation or studying most of the time. As can be understood in the sample excerpts below, the reasons for this problem differ based upon the participants’ personality, how they preferred to spend their time or where they stayed. One participant, for instance, shared her thoughts on this issue as follows:

“When I met new people from new cultures, I had some shyness at first. I was not very involved in the groups of friends for a short time, but I got over it in a week.” (Participant 12, Female, AB / Hungary)

Below is another quote from one participant who broke the prejudices:

“There was a grouping among the Europeans from time to time. Their prejudice against the Turks was a problem at first, but over time I overcame this situation and broke the prejudices.” (Participant 11, Male, FK / Finland)

Another participant suggested that he should have joined activities and interacted more:

“The main aim of the Erasmus program is exchange and interaction with different cultures. Unfortunately I couldn’t make the most of the program in this regard. Most of the time I was busy with the lessons and I couldn’t join the activities or travel to other countries. These kinds of activities are very helpful for socialization.” (Participant 2, Male, NS / Finland)

Lastly, one participant who described herself as a social person explained her thoughts:

“Normally, I’m a social and outgoing person, but there wasn’t a social environment where I could meet Erasmus students. If I had stayed at a student dormitory, it could have been different. I was staying at an apartment building and my neighbours were from Belgium. I was in touch with them most of the time. Moreover, I missed the orientation program organized at the beginning of the semester due to the delay of my visa. That was also a disadvantage for the socialization.” (Participant 5, Female, SO / Belgium)

The other sub-themes emerged under “the problems during the Erasmus process” were “**paper work**”, “**accommodation**” and “**climatic conditions**”. The findings revealed that the participants had to do paper work not only before, but also during the Erasmus process. Their comments indicated that after collecting excessive amount of documents before the Erasmus, they were unwilling to deal with paper work again. Even so, they stated that the paper work during the Erasmus process was easier to carry out: They mainly had to edit the learning agreement or obtain residence permit in the host country.

One participant mentioned the difficulty of editing the learning agreement:

“Even during the Erasmus I had to do some paper work, which was tiring. Unfortunately, some courses were cancelled when I was there, so I had to make changes in my learning agreement. It was difficult to find new courses since we were in the middle of the semester and the exams had already been over.” (Participant 9, Female, SB / Finland)

Below is a quote from two of the participants who suggested that editing the learning agreement was not as complicated as they expected:

“I had to change a few courses and edited ‘During Mobility’ part of the learning agreement. To be honest, it wasn’t as complicated as I estimated. After changing the courses and obtaining the necessary signaturas, the

problem was solved. I needn't have worried about it." (Participant 8, Female, ZÖ / Poland)

"Due to the timetable clash, I changed two of the courses in my learning agreement. At first, I had difficulty in finding suitable courses with the right credits, but it was solved easily when I followed the instructions. The paper work during the Erasmus wasn't as stressful as before the Erasmus" (Participant 10, Male, AŞ / Lithuania)

Another participant touched upon obtaining residence permit in the host country:

"Although I got the visa, I also needed to obtain residence permit when I arrived in the host country. I did not know about it. It was not difficult actually, but having been obliged to deal with paper work again made me feel stressed." (Participant 1, Female, SK / Hungary)

The results revealed that there were also participants who had problems related to **accommodation** during the Erasmus mobility. The extracts of the participants indicated that they had various accommodation problems including the price and the size of the flat, the uncleanliness of the shared areas, the crowd and the noise, as well as the lack of utensils in the dormitory. One participant who had to share a small room with someone else, for example, made the following utterances:

"My biggest problem was related to accommodation. The school did not have a student dormitory and the apartment rental prices were high in Belgium, so I had to share a 10 square-meter room with a friend for six months." (Participant 5, Female, SO / Belgium)

Another participant mentioned the hard conditions in his dormitory:

"Although I was used to living in a student dormitory, the conditions were hard: The kitchen and the bathroom were always dirty since they were shared areas. Also the building was crowded and noisy most of the time." (Participant 11, Male, FK / Finland)

The other participant commented on the lack of utensils in her room:

"There were room rental systems. I found a nice room and signed the contract. However, there was neither light bulb nor duvet cover in my room. In the evening, I bought the light bulb from the market and panicked to the street in the hope of finding blankets and bed linen." (Participant 12, Female, AB / Hungary)

One of the participants touched upon an unfortunate event related to her accommodation:

“Actually, I was satisfied with my apartment, but unfortunately towards the end of my stay, the burglar broke into my flat. He stole nearly everything. Since the door lock was completely removed, I wasn’t secure in the flat anymore. It was a horrible situation. Thankfully, my friends helped me and I stayed at their flat.” (Participant 3, Female, TÇ / Belgium)

The results showed that the participants had some problems related to the extreme weather conditions in their host country. Especially the participants who did Erasmus in Finland commented on this issue. They stated that the weather was too cold and it was dark most of the time, which was unfamiliar for them. One participant illustrated this situation in the following excerpt:

“It was hard to adapt to Finland’s weather. It was always cold and dark, we even saw -36 degrees Celsius once. I could never see the sun the last two months. It was dark when I slept, and it was dark again when I woke up. Of course this situation affected me negatively.” (Participant 2, Male, NS / Finland)

Below is a quote from two of the participant who made similar comments:

“My school was in the coldest part of Finland. When I woke up at 7o’clock in the morning, it was always dark. The sun rose up at 10 in January. These were huge differences for me. It took some time to adapt to the weather.” (Participant 9, Female, SB / Finland)

“The biggest problem I had was related to the weather. It was too cold. I spent at least half of my stay as a patient. And because of the climatic conditions, vegetables and fruits were generally very expensive.” (Participant 11, Male, FK / Finland)

Finally, one participant stated that the cold weather wasn’t a big problem for him:

“As far as I learned from my Hungarian friends, it was the coldest weather of the last sixty years in Budapest. It wasn’t a big problem for me, though. I was even happy with experiencing snowy weather.” (Participant 6, Male, ÖCU / Hungary)



Another common theme emerged from the data was **“lack of recreational activities”**. The remarks of the participants indicated that while there was a lack of recreational activities at some universities, there were also participants who thought the activities organized by the school were sufficient. One participant, for example, compared two universities in Belgium in terms of the Erasmus activities they organized:

“The education faculty of my host institution did not organize any Erasmus events. Another university in Belgium was more active in terms of holding quality activities, so we participated in those activities.” (Participant 5, Female, SO / Belgium)

Another participant stated that she wanted to spend money for travelling instead of activities:

“The social activities of the school were insufficient. There were a few activities, but they were not free. Instead of the activities, I preferred to spend my money for travelling with my own means. I wish there had been more activities.” (Participant 1, Female, SK / Hungary)

On the other hand, the other participant preferred to go to concerts rather than to travel:

“Actually, there were various recreational activities held by the ESN, but they weren’t interesting for me. I preferred to go to the rock concerts, which I enjoyed more. I spent my money for the concerts rather than travelling.” (Participant 7, Male, MK / Hungary)

When the scripts of the participants presented above are taken into consideration, it could be argued that the recreational activities were sufficient or insufficient depending on the host university, city or the country. Nevertheless, how the participants spent their time during the Erasmus mobility mainly based on their interests, hobbies and the preferences.

Next most prevalent themes were **“mentorship system”** and **“sanitary problems”**. It was revealed during the interviews that some participants were provided with a mentor student who volunteered to help them during their Erasmus mobility. While some participants were happy with the mentorship system, the others did not have a mentor or their mentor did not even answer their phone calls. The participants stated that especially during the first few weeks they needed help, but they had to take care of themselves since they did not receive support from a mentor. An extract from a participant who wasn’t provided with a mentor illustrates this situation:

“I did not have a mentor, which was a pity. When I had a problem and there was nobody to ask my questions, I felt the lack of a mentor. I tried to get help from the students who did Erasmus at the same university the previous year.” (Participant 1, Female, SK / Hungary)

Also one of the participants shared her experience as follows:

“The school had provided me with a mentor before I went there, but unfortunately she did not show up. I had to deal with my problems without any help, which wasn’t easy.” (Participant 4, Female, NM / Poland)

Another participant encountered similar problems because of her mentor:

“I had a small problem about the mentor student. Everything seemed to be all right at the beginning: The school arranged a mentor student for me and we were in touch even before my arrival. However, he did not come to pick up me from the airport. When I sent messages, I couldn’t receive any reply. There were some documents that I needed to submit but I did not know where to go. Afterwards, I made a complaint about this situation and learned that I was not the only one. Nearly 15 students had the same problem too.” (Participant 9, Female, SB / Finland)

On the other hand, there were also positive comments from the participants who were supported by their mentors throughout their mobility. One participant, for example, stated that her mentor always helped whenever she needed and they became very good friends:

“When I arrived at the airport, a mentor student picked me up and helped me get to the dormitory. She also accompanied me on the first day of school. We joined the orientation program together. The next day, she showed me around Warsaw, helped me buy a sim card... She was a great support whenever I needed help. I easily adapted to Warsaw thanks to her.” (Participant 8, Female, ZÖ / Poland)

The findings also revealed that there were a few participants who had various sanitary problems during their Erasmus stay. While some of them had problems due to the different healthcare system in the host country, the others had to pay a lot of money for a painkiller, or they had a disturbed sleep and felt depressed due to the dark weather. Furthermore, as one of the participants stated, first COVID-19 cases were reported in Europe while she was travelling to Germany, which made her worried about her health. The following scripts of the participants illustrate the sanitary problems they encountered during the Erasmus process. One participant commented on the healthcare system in Hungary:

“Healthcare system of Hungary was different. The hospitals did not have emergency service, so it was necessary to make an appointment even in case of emergency. Buying painkiller without a prescription was impossible, and most of the people did not know English. This put me in a difficult situation.” (Participant 1, Female, SK / Hungary)

Another participant mentioned his health problems occurred due to the dark weather:

“In Finland, it was always dark day-and-night, which made feel depressed. I drank too much coffee to stay awake and my sleep pattern was messed up. In order to keep my immune system strong, I started to use vitamin D pills.” (Participant 2, Male, NS / Finland)

The other participant touched upon her toothache and the price of a painkiller:

“Once I went to the polyclinic because of a severe toothache. The doctor prescribed an anti-inflammatory painkiller, for which I had to pay 120 Euro.” (Participant 3, Female, TÇ / Belgium)

Lastly, one participant mentioned her worries about the first COVID-19 cases in Europe:

“In February 2019, my last two travels before I returned to Turkey were to Germany and Sweden. We travelled on edge because the first COVID-19 cases had already been reported in Europe. Fortunately, we could return safe and sound without any problem.” (Participant 8, Female, ZÖ / Poland)

“**Language problems**” was another problem encountered by some participants during the Erasmus mobility. The study indicated that although the participants did not have any problem with communicating in English, some of them, especially the ones who did not know the mother tongue of the host country, encountered language problems when the other people did not speak English. One participant, for instance, made the following utterances:

“The lack of English explanations on the products in the markets was a major deficiency. The vast majority of the people did not speak English so I couldn’t communicate closely with local people. I spent most of my time with Turkish friends.” (Participant 7, Male, MK / Hungary)

Another participant who did Erasmus in a city of Poland shared her observations as below:

“The young population knew English well, but most of the people in Koszalin did not speak English, which made it difficult to communicate with the local people.” (Participant 4, Female, NM / Poland)

Similarly, another participant who went to Hungary reflected that;

“Most of the people in Hungary did not know English, so sometimes it was challenging to communicate.” (Participant 1, Female, SK / Hungary)

Another sub-theme emerged under the problems during the Erasmus process was **“communication problems with the teachers”** with a low frequency (f=2). The results showed that only two of the participants encountered communication problems owing to the fact that some teachers in their host university did not speak English even though the medium of instruction was English. This situation was a problem for them since they did not know the language of their host country well. One participant who did Erasmus in Poland shared her experience as below:

“Even though the medium of instruction was English at school, some teachers mostly spoke Polish in the lessons. Of course it was a problematic situation since we understood nothing. Nevertheless, I did my best to overcome this problem and managed to pass the classes.” (Participant 4, Female, NM / Poland)

The other participant who did Erasmus in Hungary made similar comments:

“We had communication problems with one of our teachers due to the fact that she did not know English. From time to time, some misunderstanding occurred and everybody got confused. I cannot say I got efficiency from that lesson.” (Participant 7, Male, MK / Hungary)

The last major sub-themes identified in the data were **“culture shock”** and **“food and drink problems”**. Each of these problems were attended by only one participant. The low frequency could be interpreted in a way that most of the participants of this study were open to different cultures, foods, experiences etc. That’s why, experiencing culture shock or having food and drink problems were not the case for most of them. The following scripts illustrate the culture shock and food and drink problems encountered by one of the participants:

“Everything was so different that I experienced culture shock at first, but then I could adapt and get used to my new routine.” (Participant 10, Male, AŞ / Lithuania)

“It took me a while to get used to the food culture of the country I went to. Also there wasn’t a dining hall at school or in the dormitory. I had to cook my own meal in the shared kitchen of the dormitory.” (Participant 10, Male, AŞ / Lithuania)

Overall, it can be understood from the participants’ extracts that the prospective EFL teachers encountered various problems during the Erasmus process. The academic problems (f=18) was the most frequently mentioned problem followed by financial problems (f=17), and socialization (f=11). The other problems mentioned by some of the participants included paper work (f=9), accommodation (f=9), climatic conditions (f=9), lack of recreational

activities (f=8), mentorship system (f=5), sanitary problems (f=5), language problems (f=4), communication problems with the teachers (f=2), culture shock (f=1), and food and drink problems (f=1).

The analysis of the semi-structured interview showed that the problems encountered by the prospective EFL teachers during the Erasmus process were more numerous compared to the problems encountered in the pre-Erasmus process. 99 comments were made regarding “the problems encountered during the Erasmus process”, which were categorized under 13 sub-themes. On the other hand, 64 comments were made regarding “the problems encountered in the pre-Erasmus process” and they were categorized under 7 sub-themes. However, more than half of the participants (56,8%) perceived the pre-Erasmus process as the most problematic period according to survey results. These results could be interpreted in a way that the participants perceived the “pre-Erasmus” as the most problematic process due to the stressful formal procedure, while they encountered more numerous problems “during the Erasmus” process, which were not as stressful as the pre-Erasmus process.

#### ***4.2.10.3. The Problems in the Post-Erasmus Process***

Table 17

*Findings on the problems encountered by prospective EFL teachers after the Erasmus program*

	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
Post Erasmus Syndrome	9	52,9
Academic Problems	6	35,3
Paper work	2	11,8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>100</b>

As can be seen in Table 17, only 3 sub-themes emerged under the problems encountered “after the Erasmus” process. Out of 17 turns provided by the participants, “Post-Erasmus Syndrome”, which refers to the difficulty in adapting to the home country after the Erasmus experience, was the most frequently mentioned problem with 9 turns (52,9%). “Academic problems” with 6 turns (35,3%), and “Paper work” with 2 turns (11,8%) were the other problems according to the participants’ remarks.

The biggest problem that most of the participants encountered after the Erasmus mobility was the difficulty in adapting back to their hometown, which can be described as “Post Erasmus Syndrome”.

One participant stated:

“The adaptation process was quite difficult when I came back to Turkey. The cars that do not give way to pedestrians, terrible news we see in the news, rude, shouting people... For a moment it feels like you will always stay there. It was difficult to face these facts when I returned.” (Participant 5, Female, SO / Belgium)

Another participant said that he felt depressed and gained weight because of this problem:

“I really liked living in Finland and if I had had a chance, I would have kept living there. When I came back to my hometown, I put on weight due to feeling depressed.” (Participant 2, Male, NS / Finland)

Two participants talked about the change of their daily routines after the Erasmus mobility:

“I had difficulty in adapting back to my life in Turkey. Although I spent only six months there, I got so used to my routine that I missed everything so much. I feel like my real home is there and I guess I can continue living there easily if I go back.” (Participant 9, Female, SB / Finland)

“My daily routine completely changed when I returned to my hometown. I missed my friends, the buildings, the city where I lived a lot. I was more relaxed and joyful when I was there. Also my schedule got busier at school, which made me feel tired.” (Participant 10, Male, AŞ / Lithuania)

Another participant further explained her reasons for Post-Erasmus syndrome:

“When I do shopping everything looks too expensive. I have been comparing the economy of two countries since I returned from Erasmus. I also missed some foods that I cannot find here. I did not feel stressed because of exams since we were tested through projects and research homework. My lessons in Turkey are more stressful. Nevertheless, I tried not to let this situation spoil my mood for a long time. I could adapt to my normal life in a few weeks.” (Participant 8, Female, ZÖ / Poland)

It can be said that most of the participants experienced “**Post-Erasmus Syndrome**” which refers to the difficulty in adapting back to the life in their hometown. According to the participants’ remarks, the daily routine, the traffic rules, the economical situation, busier and more stressful school schedule are the reasons for this syndrome. The second most prevalent theme was observed to be “**academic problems**”. Although they were content with the experience they had, some students reported that they had some academic problems after the Erasmus period. One student said that his diploma grade has dropped after the Erasmus mobility:

“I had problems with my grades. Although I got high marks there, my scores were low here due to the fact that the grading system of two schools

were different. I did not get the grade I deserved and my diploma grade has dropped.” (Participant 2, Male, NS / Finland)

As a result of the academic problems, one participant couldn't receive the rest of his grant as he stated:

“I couldn't pass four courses that I took during Erasmus. Not only my grade-point average dropped, but also I had to take a few extra courses the next year. Moreover, I couldn't receive the remaining part of my grant due to this situation. It took me a while to get over these problems.” (Participant 7, Male, MK / Hungary)

Another participant mentioned that she had to take too many courses the following year because of the academic problems:

“The only academic problem was that I had to take eleven courses the following semester in Turkey due to the courses I failed during the Erasmus. It was challenging but I managed to overcome.” (Participant 5, Female, SO / Belgium)

Finally, one student commented on an academic problem due to the mismatch of the courses in the Learning agreement:

“At the end of the program, I realized that I had mismatched one of the courses and I had to take that course again in Turkey even if I actually passed it. This situation put me in a difficult situation.” (Participant 1, Female, SK / Hungary)

The least mentioned problem encountered after the Erasmus mobility was “**paper work**”. According to the extracts from the interviews presented below, it can be seen that the participants encountered some problems related to paper work in the post-Erasmus period again, though not as many as in “the pre-Erasmus” period.

For example, one participant commented:

“I had to make some changes in my learning agreement towards the end of November and the approval of my documents was delayed. As a result, my returning procedure has not ended and I have not received the rest of my grant yet. I'm still waiting.” (Participant 9, Female, SB / Finland)

A quote from another participants is as follows:

“Constantly we had to prepare some documents, even after we completed the Erasmus mobility! I was fed up with collecting documents and felt confused.” (Participant 1, Female, SK / Hungary)

As a whole, it was indicated that the problems encountered after the Erasmus mobility are not as diverse as the problems encountered before and during the Erasmus. The biggest problem after the Erasmus period was the post Erasmus syndrome, which means the difficulty in adapting back to the normal life in the hometown.

The overall findings of this study show that the prospective EFL teachers who participated in the Erasmus exchange program mostly had a positive attitude towards their experience. Most of the participants think that the biggest contribution of the Erasmus exchange program was to their personal and cultural development. Although it had also positive contributions to their language and social development, the participants mostly highlighted the personal and cultural gains. Regarding the career and academic development, the participants' opinions differ based on the variables such as their host university and the country where they had been during the Erasmus mobility.

Apart from the contributions, the participants also encountered various problems before, during, and after the Erasmus mobility. It should be pointed out that the number of citations regarding the problems encountered "during the Erasmus" process (99 times) surpass the citations regarding the problems encountered "before the Erasmus" (64 times ) and "after the Erasmus" (17 times) process. However, according to the survey results, most of the participants (56,8%) regard the pre-Erasmus process as the most problematic period. When the interview extracts of the participants were examined, it was seen that the main problems encountered before the Erasmus were related to formal procedure (preparing the Learning Agreement, applying for the visa, getting a passport...), during which the participants felt the most stressful. On the other hand, the problems encountered during the Erasmus mobility were more diverse compared to the problems before the Erasmus: Academic problems, economic problems, socialization, accommodation, climatic conditions, language problems, food and drink problems etc.

To sum up, it could be said that the participants of the current study thought that the biggest contribution of the Erasmus exchange program was to their personal and cultural development. In addition, they also encountered a lot of problems throughout the Erasmus process. They perceived the "pre-Erasmus" as the most problematic process due to the stressful formal procedure, while they encountered more numerous problems "during the Erasmus" process, as a result of which they learned how to cope with challenges. The main problem encountered "after the Erasmus" process was the difficulty in adapting back to the life in their hometown, which is described as "post-Erasmus syndrome".



## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION & SUGGESTIONS**

#### **5.1. Introduction**

In this chapter, the discussion regarding the common grounds and the differences between the current study and earlier studies are presented. In addition, the conclusions are drawn in the light of the results and their implications. As a final point, the suggestions for further research are included.

#### **5.2. Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the contributions of Erasmus exchange program to the Turkish prospective EFL teachers' academic, language, social, cultural, personal and career development as well as the problems they encountered before, during and after the Erasmus process. To that end, the experience and perceptions of Turkish prospective EFL teachers who participated in the Erasmus program were explored by means of an online survey developed by Önen (2017) and the semi-structured interview. The study was conducted with the voluntary participation of 37 prospective EFL teachers studying at Dokuz Eylül University as explained in the method chapter. The students who had returned from the Erasmus mobility were contacted and the survey link was sent through an e-mail to them. Out of 37 participants who completed the survey, 10 volunteer students were randomly chosen for the semi-structured interview sessions and each one of them was interviewed via Skype for nearly 40 minutes. The data collection procedure was completed in eight weeks. The results obtained from this research will be discussed regarding the research questions and related studies in the literature.

### **5.2.1. The Contributions of Erasmus exchange program to Prospective EFL Teachers**

Our first research question was to what extent Erasmus exchange program contributed to prospective EFL teachers' development in various fields. The analysis of the quantitative data revealed that the majority of the participants (89,2%) believed that the personal development was the biggest contribution of participating in Erasmus exchange program followed by cultural development (78,4%), language development (59,5%), social development (59,5%), academic development (45,9%) and career development (21,6%). It is clear that the participants believed the Erasmus program had positive effects in many aspects. Teichler (2001) suggests that the Erasmus program is considered as a valuable experience especially in terms of cultural and personal development. Also the participants of the current study appreciated their personal and cultural gains most. Two similar studies with Turkish prospective EFL teachers were conducted by Aydın (2012) and Önen (2017). They also investigated the contributions of the Erasmus program to Turkish prospective EFL teachers and the problems encountered in the process.

Aydın (2012) conducted a qualitative study and collected data from 23 prospective EFL teachers through a background questionnaire, interviews, group discussions and essay papers. He found that "the Erasmus process has contributed considerably to participants' language skills and knowledge, their professional and personal development, and their perceptions towards culture and recreational activities" (p.14). Similarly, in her study, Önen (2017) stated that "the participants put forward that they have benefited from the program mostly in terms of cultural accumulation and personal development" (p.350). As for the contributions of the Erasmus program, there is a slight difference between the current study and Önen's study. While cultural development was in the first and personal development in the second place in her study, according to the survey results of this study, the personal development was in the first and cultural development in the second place.

In order to gain deeper understanding of the Erasmus experience of the participants, the mixed method approach was adopted in the present study as explained in the method chapter. In addition to online survey, semi-structured interviews were also conducted. The results of each domain will be discussed in a more detailed way under the next subheadings.

#### ***5.2.1.1. Academic Development***

The second research question of our study aimed to find out the contributions of Erasmus exchange program to prospective EFL teachers' academic development. The survey results indicated that 17 out of 37 participants (45,9 %) thought that Erasmus program had

much effect, 6 out of 37 participants (16,2 %) suggested it had too little effect, and only one participant stated it had no effect on their academic development. It is clear that the participants had different ideas on this issue. In addition, qualitative results indicated that experiencing a different education system (f=23), producing projects (f=10) and learning how to do research (f=7) were the most crucial contributions of Erasmus program to their academic development. In his review of temporary study abroad, Teichler (2004a) argues that the Erasmus students wished to have especially culturally rich and linguistically valuable experiences. Although the academic achievement was on the agenda from the outset, their priority was enjoying life in a different environment by travelling and meeting people. He concludes his argument by stating that the students emphasized the cultural, language and personal contributions more favourably than the academic value of the temporary study period abroad. The findings of the current study parallel Teichler's (2004) assertion since the academic achievement was not the priority for most of the participants in our study as well. Taking into consideration the fact that they encountered many academic problems such as failing some courses and a drop in their gpa; it could even be assumed that their Erasmus experience might bring some risks for their academic achievement. However, in spite of these risks and problems, all participants appreciated their Erasmus experience overall and stated that they would do it again if they had a chance. There are several studies (Aydin 2012; Caner, 2019; İlter, 2013; Önen, 2017) conducted with prospective EFL teachers providing valuable insights into the contributions of Erasmus program to the academic development of the participants. The common finding of these studies was that studying abroad in the framework of Erasmus program provided the student teachers with an international experience where they gained knowledge about different education systems and this opportunity helped them be more self-confident in their academic life. Moreover, it was seen that they were encouraged to be active participant in another international project as well. However, the academic gains were not as many as the personal, cultural and linguistic gains in these studies, which was also the same in the current study. For instance, in Önen's (2017) study only 36,67% of the participants believed that the Erasmus program had much effect on their academic development. Although this percentage was slightly higher in our study (45,9%), it was still lower compared to the other domains. In this respect, it can be stated that our findings accord with the findings of abovementioned studies.

On the other hand, there are some other studies conducted with Erasmus students from different departments in which the researchers found out that the Erasmus program greatly contributed to the academic development of the participants (Aslan & Jacobs, 2014;

Bakioğlu and Certel, 2010; Botas & Huisman, 2013; Çağlar-Erdoğan, 2019; Özdem, 2013; Papatsiba, 2005; Şahin, 2019). For instance, Papatsiba (2005) conducted a mixed-method study with the participation of 80 Erasmus students and he highlighted that the academic experience was the most developed component as reported by the participants. They appreciated the quality of the education they received in the host country, the pedagogic style of the teachers, the student-centered lectures and so on. Similarly, Bakioğlu & Certel (2010) focused specifically on the academic lives of the Turkish Erasmus exchange students. The qualitative data gathered from 30 university students revealed a surprising result. Although the wish to gain academic experience in another country was not their priority when they decided to study abroad, the participants found studying abroad academically important and advantageous. In other words, their initial aims such as having the chance to see abroad, meeting new cultures or gaining personal benefits later changed direction by embracing academic aims. The Erasmus students were especially affected by the learning environments and the student-centered teaching method they witnessed. In addition, Aslan & Jacobs (2014) examined the views of 95 Erasmus students and qualitative findings indicated that the participants mainly appreciated practicing opportunities, social projects, flexible exams, teamwork, flexible attendance and elective course opportunities. Moreover, many of the students stated that they learned to do academic research and gained research skills during their stay. Although some similarities are observed between the findings of the aforementioned studies and the current study in terms of the academic gains such as experiencing a different education system, producing projects, learning how to do research, and better presentation skills; these were not declared by the majority of the participants in our study. However, in other studies nearly all participants reported these academic gains. The different results might be explained by the quality of the education provided by the host institutions as well as the individual factors such as the participants' motivation, personal effort, priorities and how they preferred to spend their time during mobility. For instance, it was inferred from our participants' remarks that the students who reported academic benefits such as producing projects, learning how to do research and better presentation skills were generally the ones who did their Erasmus in Finland or at institutions which provided high-quality education.

Approaching from another perspective, Di Pietro & Page (2008) argued that "Students with poor academic records are less likely to go abroad with Erasmus than their peers who have good academic records" (p.396). Since the universities set up selection processes that are based on past student performance and foreign language competence, it can be stated that one of the most important predictors of studying abroad is early school performance, as

proposed by Di Pietro & Page (2008). From this perspective, it may also be claimed that the Erasmus students had already been equipped with effective academic skills prior to their mobility. This might be the reason why they reported relatively less academic gains compared to the other areas.

All in all, it can be concluded that participating in the Erasmus exchange program does not necessarily result in academic success. The academic gains of the Erasmus students are dependent on some variables. Based on these variables, the program may bring noteworthy benefits or some disadvantages in terms of academic development. Therefore, making agreements with the institutions which provide good quality education and organizing meetings to help the students be ready for their academic life at the host university prior to their mobility period might be reasonable to make sure of maximising academic gains.

#### ***5.2.1.2. Language Development***

One of the aims of the existing study was to investigate the contributions of Erasmus exchange program to prospective EFL teachers' language development. According to survey results, more than half of the participants (59,5 %) stated that Erasmus had much effect on their language development. Kinginger (2008) suggests that study abroad context is especially beneficial for the development of oral skills, which is also the case in our study. Qualitative findings revealed that the linguistic gains of the participants were mostly in terms of speaking skills and fluency development. They mentioned that they could speak English more fluently (f=20), had a chance to communicate in a meaningful context (f=20) and felt more self-confident in using English (f=10) thanks to their Erasmus experience.

Previous studies about the Erasmus experience of Turkish prospective EFL teachers (Aydın, 2012; İlter, 2013; Kızılaslan, 2010; Önen, 2017) also demonstrated that Erasmus exchange program had significant impact on the language development of the participants. In his qualitative study Aydın (2012) found that the participants believed their Erasmus experience improved their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills as well as their pronunciation and vocabulary in English. There seems to be a slight difference between the findings of our study and Aydın's study. As mentioned previously, the participants of the current study expressed their linguistic gains by focusing on the speaking skill and fluency development. However, the participants in Aydın's study reported improvement in their reading and writing skills as well. On the other hand, the participants in İlter's (2013) study

emphasized the positive effect of Erasmus program on their language development especially in terms of speaking skill, which is in accordance with our study.

In addition to these studies, there are some other studies which was conducted with the Erasmus participants from different departments (Ife, 2000; Llanes et al., 2012; Jacobone & Moro, 2015; Kayaoğlu, 2016; Çağlar-Erdoğan, 2019; Cantez, 2020). Our study is supported by these studies which also evidenced that the Erasmus students' speaking skills improved more significantly than the other skills during their mobility period. For instance, in a mixed-method research Çağlar-Erdoğan (2019) found that the students developed self-confidence in using English after the Erasmus mobility. Moreover, Cantez (2020) investigated the views of the Erasmus participants regarding their foreign language motivation and speaking fluency development. The qualitative findings showed that Erasmus exchange program contributed to participants' English speaking fluency and foreign language learning motivation. In addition, Llanes et al. (2012) conducted an empirical study in order to examine the effects of Erasmus experience on the written and oral performance of 24 Spanish Erasmus students studying English as a second language in the UK. As a result of the written and oral data elicited from the participants, it was found that the linguistic gains were more significant in oral than in written production. Also in Kayaoğlu's (2016) study more improvement was observed in the participants' oral proficiency. It was seen from the students' self-reports that they appreciated the opportunity to use the language for a genuine reason, which was also observed in the remarks of our participants.

Erasmus program provides the participants with a multicultural context where they can speak English for real-life purposes. Consequently, this situation may play a crucial role in the improvement of participants' speaking skills. As Jacobone & Moro (2015) state, studying abroad "expands the four walls of the traditional language classroom to include the streets and people of any given culture" (p.325). However, it should also be noted that the context is not the only factor that affect the degree of language development. As Llanes et al. (2012, p.329) suggest, linguistic gains emerged in study abroad context are not "only attributable to the conditions of learning context itself but also to the participants' individual differences that will, in large part, determine the degree of language development". In other words, some individual differences among the participants such as attitudes, motivation and L2 contact play a role when learning a foreign language abroad. Nonetheless, as Kinginger (2008) puts forward; regardless of the individual characteristics, Erasmus experience particularly contributes to the oral skills of most Erasmus participants. The reason why the

participants in our study only mentioned their language gains in terms of speaking skills might be explained by the fact that the participants of the current study consist of only prospective EFL teachers, and they have already a good command of English. Similarly, in Souto-Otero's (2008) study, it was observed that the participants were already competent in foreign languages before the Erasmus mobility. It can be argued that this situation might be the same for most of the Erasmus students since they need to pass English exams before they can have a chance to participate in the Erasmus program. Therefore, even if Erasmus experience contributes to the language development of the participants, it is not a language learning program and a sufficient linguistic background is necessary to benefit from the program.

### **5.2.1.3. Social Development**

Another aim of the present study was to investigate the the contributions of Erasmus exchange program to prospective EFL teachers' social development. The survey results indicated that more than half of the participants (59,5 %) thought Erasmus program had much effect and only four participants stated that it had too little effect on their social development. Besides, the qualitative results revealed that the social gains of the participants were adaptation to new social environments (f=26), forming international friendships (f=23), opportunities for recreational activities (f=22) having fun and taking up new hobbies (f=9). The results support the findings of the previous studies which focused on the prospective EFL teachers (Aydın, 2012; İlter, 2013; Önen, 2017). The participants in these studies expressed their social gains as adaptation to new social environments (Aydın, 2012), forming international friendships, learning the social life of the host country and gaining social responsibilities (İlter, 2013). Moreover, the findings of the Önen's study (2017) revealed that 60% of the participants believed Erasmus program had much effect on their social development. It was the third most improved area after cultural and personal development, which accords with the results of our study.

According to the Council of Europe (2007, as cited in İlter, 2013, p. 181), "plurilingual and multicultural education provide mutual understanding and social cohesion which enable the students improve their social skills". Both the current study and the other related studies in the literature seem to confirm this claim. In addition to the studies conducted with prospective EFL teachers, there are also national (Bakioğlu & Certel, 2010; Çelik 2018; Kohn, 2015; Şahin, 2019) and international (Botas & Huisman, 2013; Bryła,

2015; Sigalas, 2010) studies which focused on the Erasmus students from other departments and found similar results. The participants in these studies reported similar social gains: They claimed that their experience enabled them to be ready for the life (Bakioğlu & Certel, 2010), socialise with other Europeans more than before (Sigalas, 2010), develop their social capital (Botas & Huisman, 2013), feel more courageous in social contacts (Bryła, 2015), experience new social habit and ideas in the host country (Kohn, 2015), and improve social relations (Çelik, 2018; Şahin, 2019). Sigalas (2010) claims that “Erasmus seems to have met one of its key objectives, namely, leading to increased interaction between Europeans” (p.1351), and both the findings of the aforementioned studies and the present study confirm his argument.

#### ***5.2.1.4. Cultural Development***

The fifth research question was asked to investigate the contributions of Erasmus exchange program to prospective EFL teachers’ cultural development. According to survey results, 29 out of 37 participants (78,4%) stated that Erasmus program had much effect and 7 out of 37 participants (18,9 %) suggested it had an effect on their cultural development. Only one student thought that it had too little effect. The qualitative findings provide more detailed results on the issue. The most frequently mentioned cultural gains by the participants were gaining knowledge about various cultures and life styles (f=22), gaining broader perception toward various cultures (f=22), and feeling like a global citizen (f=19). The results parallel the studies conducted with Turkish prospective EFL teachers (Aydın, 2012; Caner, 2019; İter, 2013; Kızılaslan, 2010; Önen, 2017). In İter’s (2013) study it was found that the participants had a wider perspective towards different cultures, developed cross-cultural awareness, and also improved awareness of their own culture. Similarly, Aydın’s (2012) study displayed that the participants greatly benefited from the program in terms of cultural development and gained humanistic point of view, which is one of the most important aims of the Erasmus program. Additionally, 86.67% of the participants in Önen’s (2017) study also thought that the Erasmus experience had the greatest impact on their cultural accumulation. As a more contemporary example, Caner’s (2019) study focused on the professional gains of the prospective EFL teachers after the Erasmus program. It was indicated that the participants gained awareness on the cultural diversities of learners and recognized the importance of treating all learners equally. As suggested by Caner, generally Turkish prospective EFL teachers do not have chances to practice teaching in multicultural



environments. Therefore, the Erasmus program seems to foster inter-cultural awareness of the future teachers of English. Together with these studies, there are many other national (Aktan & Sarı, 2010; Çelik, 2018; Demir & Demir, 2009; Endes, 2015; Ersoy & Günel, 2011; Gökten, 2017; Kağnıcı, 2016; Kohn, 2015; Mulcar, 2019; Özişik, 2017; Pehlivaner, 2006; Sari, 2014; Şahin, 2019) and international studies (Botas & Huisman, 2013; Bryła, 2015; Jacobone & Moro, 2015; Papatsiba, 2005; Raikou & Karalis, 2010; Sigalas, 2010) which were conducted with the Erasmus students from other departments and found similar results. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Erasmus exchange program provides its participants with valuable cultural gains regardless of their majors and plays a vital role in humanisation process.

#### ***5.2.1.5. Personal Development***

The sixth research question aimed to find out the contributions of Erasmus exchange program to prospective EFL teachers' personal development. Both the survey and the interview findings clearly showed that the prospective EFL teachers benefited from the Erasmus program mostly in terms of personal development. 33 out of 37 participants (89,2 %) put forward that the program had much effect on their personal development and four participants stated it had an effect. The qualitative findings indicated that thanks to their Erasmus experience, the participants had a lot of personal gains such as learning how to cope with challenges (f=19), gaining survival skills (f=17), self-realization (f=17), being open to differences (f=16), sense of being able to succeed (f=16), stepping outside of comfort zone (f=16) etc. According to these findings, it was concluded that Erasmus experience played a vital role in the personal growth of the participants. The related studies in the literature show a strong positive correlation between the Erasmus program and its personal contributions and our results are corroborated by some studies conducted with Turkish prospective EFL teachers (Aydın, 2012; İlter, 2013; Kızılaslan, 2010; Önen, 2017). Majority of these studies revealed that the prospective EFL teachers benefited from the Erasmus program mostly in terms of personal development, which was also the case in the current study.

In Önen's (2017) study, 73.33% of the participants thought that the Erasmus experience had much effect on their personal development. However, the most improved area was cultural development in her study with 86.67%. On the other hand, in our study, personal development was reported to be the most important contribution of the Erasmus program by the 89.2 % of the participants. Additionally, the participants in İlter's (2013)

study were observed to become more self-confident and improve their intra and interpersonal skills. Similarly, Aydın (2012) found that the prospective EFL teachers gained awareness of how to cope with difficulties, increased their self-confidence, learned how to use limited money, take decisions on their own, take risks and responsibilities about their life, and most importantly discovered themselves in terms of their personality, competences, likes and dislikes. These personal gains were also mentioned by the prospective EFL teachers in our study.

In addition to these examples, there are also national (Çepni et al., 2018; Demir & Demir, 2009; Ersoy & Günel, 2011; Kohn, 2015; Mutlu et al., 2010; Özmen, 2019; Şahin, 2019; Tekin & Hiç-Gencer, 2013) and international studies (Bryła, 2015; Jacobone and Moro, 2015; Papatsiba, 2005; Raikou and Karalis, 2010) which were conducted with the Erasmus students from other departments. The findings of these studies also provide evidence for the personal development that achieved through participating in the Erasmus program. Finally, it should be noted that the frequencies of “self-realization” (f=17) and “self-confidence” (f=14) do not go hand in hand in the present study. According to this result, it can be argued that the Erasmus program provides the students with a context where they can discover their personality, potential and competences; however, self-realization does not necessarily result in self-confidence. Consequently, it might be concluded that self-realization of the participants eventually trigger their self-confidence.

#### ***5.2.1.6. Career Development***

The seventh research question aimed to find out the contributions of Erasmus exchange program to prospective EFL teachers’ career development. According to survey results, the least affected domain by the Erasmus program was the career development of prospective EFL teachers. Only 8 out of 37 participants (21,6 %) stated Erasmus program had much effect on their career development while 18 out of 37 participants (48,6%) suggested it had an effect, seven participants (18,9%) proposed it had too little effect and four participants (10,8%) thought it had no affect. On the other hand, the qualitative findings of the current study revealed that some participants regarded the Erasmus mobility as a valuable experince for their career development. For instance, the parcipants mostly made comments about learning about various education systems, language teaching methods and techniques (f=20) as well as having a chance to compare different education systems (f=16) and feeling more self-confident in making future plans (f=16). Some of them also believed

that their Erasmus experience would provide them with various job opportunities in Turkey and abroad (f=10) and create a difference on their CV.

The majority of the earlier studies (Aydın, 2012; Caner, 2019; İter, 2013; Kızılaslan, 2010) conducted with Turkish prospective EFL teachers supports that participating in the Erasmus program contributes to the participants' career development in various ways. In a qualitative study İter (2013) found that by means of their Erasmus experience, prospective EFL teachers felt ready for their future career. Since they struggled to use foreign languages throughout their life abroad, they believed that they would be communicative language teachers. In a similar vein, Kızılaslan (2010) explored 10 Turkish prospective EFL teachers' Erasmus experiences through a qualitative approach. The findings revealed that the participants developed deeper understanding and tolerance of others thanks to the Erasmus program, and they believed that this would positively influence their relationships with students, parents, and colleagues in the workplace. Additionally, Aydın's (2012) study revealed that the participants found the Erasmus program valuable for their professional development and had positive perceptions towards language teaching methods and techniques. In a more contemporary qualitative study, Caner (2019) examined the perceptions of 19 prospective EFL teachers regarding the contribution of the Erasmus experience to their career development and found that studying in an international environment positively affected the participants' future profession by raising their awareness on active learning, inclusive practices and international education policies. In terms of the professional gains such as experiencing different education systems, learning about new language teaching methods, practicing their teaching skills through internship opportunities, and feeling more self-confident about future employment, the findings of the current study are in line with the findings of the studies by Aydın (2012), Kızılaslan (2010) and İter (2013). However, these gains were not reported by the majority of the participants in our study. Moreover, according to survey results, only 8 out of 37 participants believed Erasmus had much effect on their career development. In this respect, our findings corroborate the findings of Önen's (2017) study in which the career development was perceived as the least improved domain during the Erasmus program. This result might be due to the fact that some participants could not take courses related to their major since there was not faculty of education at their host institution or some lecturers did not speak English and they could not get efficiency from their professional experience.

As it was the case in the academic development, the contributions of Erasmus program on the career development depend on some variables as well. Although Caner (2019) underlined the role of the host institution's curricula, she concluded that the prospective EFL teachers had many professional gains regardless of the qualities of the host countries or the host institutions. In this regard, the current study contradicts with Caner's study, because, in our study, the participants' perceptions regarding their career development differed based upon their host university.

There are a great number of studies conducted with the Erasmus students from different majors as well (Akman, 2014; Aktan & Sarı, 2010; Bakioğlu & Certel, 2010; Çelik, 2018; Demir and Demir, 2009; Ece, 2018; Endes, 2015; Engel, 2010; Ersoy & Günel, 2011; Jacobone and Moro, 2015; Messer and Wolter, 2007; Özdem, 2013; Raikou and Karalis, 2010; Stilianos et al., 2013; Şahin, 2019). These studies provide evidence that Erasmus experience brings various advantages for the participants' career development. Demir and Demir (2009) conducted a qualitative study to evaluate the contributions of Erasmus program to the prospective teachers. It was revealed that the participants gained awareness of different educational systems and felt more confident in teaching, which was in line with the findings of the current study. Another qualitative study with prospective teachers was carried out by Ersoy and Günel (2011). They investigated the experiences of eight prospective teachers who came to Turkey from Finland, Poland, Hungary, Germany and Norway in the framework of Erasmus exchange program. The findings revealed that diverse field experiences helped the participants understand the importance of adopting multicultural approach in their classrooms. The experiences of the participants during their mobility influenced their professional development as future teachers in a global society, which was also stated by our participants.

Teichler and Janson (2007) suggested that the Erasmus program had a positive impact on subsequent employment and work. The findings of the current study and abovementioned studies parallel Teichler's (2007) assertion. In his review of empirical studies about the impact of Erasmus mobility on the professional career, Engel (2010) stated that the Erasmus students "feel to be better prepared for future employment and to be somewhat better at field specific knowledge and skills" (p.5). As he suggested, although self-assessment of the participants might not be realistic, a survey study revealed that the employers perceive mobile graduates as more superior compared to non-mobile graduates in terms of international competences. In her quantitative study, Endes (2015) applied Erasmus Students

Satisfaction Survey to the 50 university students in order to determine the contributions of Erasmus experience to their career development. The participants pointed out that thanks to the Erasmus Program, they had overseas experience that would create a plus to their CV. As mentioned before, the participants of the present study expected their Erasmus experience to create a difference on their CV as well. Indeed, the Erasmus participants seem to believe that their experience would have a positive impact on their career and increase their job opportunities. Also the findings of the current study indicated that the prospective EFL teachers believed that their Erasmus experience would provide them with more employment opportunities in Turkey and abroad. Similarly, In a more contemporary research, Şahin (2019) explored the contributions of Erasmus experience to the professional development of 30 university students qualitatively. She found that the participants established business and network connections, developed professional thinking and competence. Moreover, they were planning to work abroad. The participants of the current study also made similar comments.

The aforementioned studies provide evidence for the fact that regardless of their major, the Erasmus students returned home with a wide range of professional gains. In our study, which focused on the experiences of prospective EFL teachers, it was also found that the participants emphasized several professional gains such as learning about different education systems and language teaching methods, comparing different education systems, feeling more self-confident in making future plans. In spite of these gains mentioned by the participants, the career development was not emphasized as much as the personal and cultural gains in the current study. This situation could be explained by the fact that the experiences of the participants vary based upon their host country and host institution. That is, while the participants who were content with the education offered by their host university made positive comments about their academic and professional gains, the participants who were not happy with the quality of education in the host country tended to make negative comments on this issue. Similarly, in their analysis of the professional value of Erasmus mobility, Bracht et al. (2006) mentioned that there was not an obvious difference between the mobile and non-mobile students in terms of general academic and professional development. Nonetheless, it might be reasonable to conclude that the Erasmus program provides valuable experience for the career development of some participants, though it is not emphasized as much as the personal and cultural gains. Therefore, it is essential to meticulously choose which institutions to make agreements with so that the participants can make the most of their Erasmus experience in terms of career development as well.

### **5.2.2. The problems encountered throughout the Erasmus process and possible solutions**

The last three research questions of the study aimed to investigate the problems encountered by the prospective EFL teachers during the Erasmus process. For this purpose, the eighth research question was whether the prospective EFL teachers encountered any problems throughout the Erasmus process. The results clearly showed that the participants had a lot of problems throughout the Erasmus process. Nearly half of the participants (43,2%) stated that they had a lot of problems and only one participant suggested he never had problems. There are several studies which also revealed that prospective EFL teachers encountered a wide range of problems throughout the Erasmus process (Aydın, 2012; Çiftçi, 2016; İltter, 2013; Kızılaslan, 2010; Önen, 2017; Yıldırım & İlin, 2013). According to these findings, it can be assumed that the Erasmus program requires its participants to be ready for a long and demanding process since there are many points to consider in each period.

The results of the present study also showed that more than half of the participants (56,8%) regarded “the pre-Erasmus process” as the most problematic period and 14 out of 37 participants (37,8%) thought “the post-Erasmus process” was the least problematic period. Similarly, the participants in Önen’s (2017) study perceived the pre-Erasmus as the most challenging period.

Although the participants of this study were content with their experience in spite of the problems they encountered, it is essential to minimize the problems as much as possible by understanding the reasons for the problems. To that end, by means of semi-structured interview sessions, it was aimed to gain more detailed knowledge about the problems encountered by the participants. Thus, the last research question aimed to explore the types of problems encountered by the prospective EFL teachers before, during and after the Erasmus process. The results of this question are discussed in the light of the literature under the next sub-headings.

#### **5.2.2.1. The pre-Erasmus process**

The findings revealed that the main problems encountered by the participants in the pre-Erasmus process were lack of information and insufficient guidance (f=16), paper work (f=12), finding equivalent courses and preparation of learning agreement (f=12), and visa procedure (f=11). Ideally, both home and host institutions should provide the students with adequate information prior to the mobility period (Teichler, 2004). However, most of the participants in our study were overwhelmed by the paper work and struggled due to the lack

of information in the post-Erasmus process. The current study confirmed the earlier studies by revealing that paper work before the Erasmus mobility was a big challenge not only for prospective EFL teachers (Aydın, 2012; Çiftçi, 2016; Önen, 2017), but also for the other Erasmus students from different departments (Endes, 2012; Maiworm, Steube, & Teichler, 1992; Yücelsin-Taş, 2015). For instance, it was indicated in Aydın's (2012) and Maiworm et al.'s (1992) studies that the participants complained about the complexity of formal procedures. Similarly, in Önen's (2017) study it was indicated that paper work was the most problematic and stressful issue for the prospective EFL teachers in the pre-Erasmus process. Selecting equivalent courses and preparing the learning agreement were also challenging for them. On the other hand, visa applications were perceived as a less challenging problem while for our participants it was also a stressful procedure.

With a sepecific focus on the pre-Erasmus process, Çiftçi (2016) conducted a phenomenological study in which he analysed the lived and imagined experiences of three Turkish prospective EFL teachers who studied in England for 4 months in the framework of Erasmus program. The preparation process of the participants were observed through semi-structured interviews, smartphone messages and reports written by the participants. It was found that the participants experienced a stressful formal preparation which involved excessive paper work and strict visa procedures. Since they had to allocate most of their time to the formal preparation period with insufficient guidance, they lacked awareness about the informal preparation. The findings of this study are in accordance with our findings, which indicated that the excessive paper work, visa procedure and trying to handle these issues with a lack of information were the most challenging problems encountered in the pre-Erasmus process. However, the participants of the current study did not develop a fear of speaking English or have stereotyped knowledge and attitude toward the host country contrary to the participants in Çiftçi's study. It can be clearly seen from the aforementioned studies that the formal procedure in which the participants had to deal with excessive paper work was quite challenging and stressful for them. Sufficient guidance and informative seminars provided by the instutions play a crucial role in overcoming these problems.

#### ***5.2.2.2. During the Erasmus process***

Even though the participants found the pre-Erasmus period as the most problematic process according to survey results, the qualitative findings revealed that the problems encountered by the participants during the Erasmus mobility were more numerous. Mainly,

the most frequently mentioned problems were as follows: Academic problems (f=18), financial problems (f=17), socialization (f=11), paper work (f=9), accommodation (f=9), and climatic conditions (f=9). As can be seen, the most problematic issue during the Erasmus process was found to be academic problems that stemmed from various reasons. There are several studies which reported similar results in terms of academic problems (Aydın, 2012; Önen, 2017; Yıldırım & İlin, 2013). Yıldırım & İlin (2013) carried out a mixed-method research in order to explore the problems encountered by 55 prospective EFL teachers during their Erasmus mobility. It was indicated that participants encountered academic problems due to the difference in education systems. These results are supported also by the studies of Maiworm et al. (1992) and Maiworm & Teichler (1995). Maiworm et al. (1992) found that the participants complained about the mismatches between the curricula of two universities.

On the other hand, our findings in terms of academic problems encountered during the Erasmus mobility contradict with Engel's study (2010) in which the participants rarely reported academic problems during the Erasmus mobility. In our study, however, one participant had to register courses from other departments since there was not faculty of education at his host institution; another participant could not take enough courses since the registration process had been over in summer and he did not know about it; two of the participants complained that they could not understand some of the courses since the lecturers did not speak English. Although there were several participants who did not have any academic problems, these findings clearly illustrates the need for the agreements between the institutions to be made more meticulously for the sake of the productive academic gains.

Financial problems were also encountered by nearly all of the participants in the current study. Although the students received a monthly grant and they spent it reasonably, the amount they received were not enough to cover their all expenses. Earlier studies found similar findings on this issue (Aydın, 2012; Engel, 2010; Önen, 2017). Aydın (2012) stated that the prospective EFL teachers in his study complained about the amount and delay of the monthly grant. Similarly, in Engel's (2010) and Önen's (2017) study the participants frequently mentioned their financial problems. As for the problems related to accommodation, our findings contradict with Önen's (2017) study in which accommodation was considered as a minor problem and correspond with the studies which presented accommodation as a major problem for the participants (Aslan & Jacob, 2014; Engel, 2010; Yıldırım & İlin, 2013). These differences might be due to the fact that the quality of facilities



provided by each institution is different. For instance, it was inferred from our participants' comments that while some universities provided a wide range of economic accommodation options, other universities even did not have a student dormitory. That's why, it can be argued that the host institutions were important determinants of the problems encountered by the participants.

With regards to the cultural problems, a surprising result which was different from the earlier studies was observed. For instance, Yıldırım & İlin (2013) carried out a mixed-method research in order to explore the problems encountered by 55 prospective EFL teachers when they were adapting to a new culture during their Erasmus mobility. The analysis of the Socio-cultural Adaptation scale, reports and interviews revealed that students experienced problems at affective, behavioural, and cognitive levels. The problems such as climate, sanitary problems, accommodation, academic and language related problems were also mentioned by our participants. However, eating habits were the most cited problem in their study while it was mentioned only once in our study. Besides, only one of the participants in our study mentioned that he experienced culture shock, while in Yıldırım & İlin's (2013) and Önen's (2017) study it was experienced by most of the participants. This situation might be explained by the unique characteristics of the participants and to what extent they were open to differences.

Finally, some language problems occurred since the participants of this study did not know the native language spoken in the host country, as in line with Önen's (2017) study. However, this issue was mentioned less frequently by our participants. Erasmus program provides an international environment where the participants use English as mutual language. Consequently, their language-related problems might have been solved easily.

### ***5.2.2.3. The post-Erasmus process***

As for the problems encountered after the Erasmus mobility, the survey results are in line with qualitative findings. There were only three problems mentioned by the participants: Post Erasmus Syndrome (f=9), academic problems (f=6), and paper work (f=2). After the Erasmus process, although the participants did not encounter as many problems as before and during the mobility period, most of the participants experienced "the post-Erasmus syndrome". This issue, which is referred as post-Erasmus syndrome, can be described as the difficulty experienced by the participants in adapting to their school and old lifestyle in the

home country again. Actually, since most of the students go abroad for the first time in their life thanks to the Erasmus program, this finding is not surprising and it might be normal to experience this feeling. Similarly, it was also found in Aydın's (2012) and Önen's (2017) studies that the prospective EFL teachers had difficulties in adapting to the lessons, teaching methods, exams, traffic and the lifestyle in their hometown in the post-Erasmus process. On the other hand, there are also studies where the post-Erasmus syndrome was not mentioned (İlter, 2013; Kızılaslan, 2010; Yıldırım & İlin, 2013). This might be because of the fact that these studies did not specifically focus on the problems experienced after the Erasmus mobility.

Another common problem encountered after the Erasmus mobility was the recognition of the courses, which was also observed in Aydın's (2012) and Önen's (2017) study. Although the Erasmus program brings many academic benefits, there are also several problems which result from the unique education system of each host country. Most of the participants in the current study complained about the drop in their grade-point average because of the different grading systems of their host and home institutions. Moreover, some students could not receive the remaining part of their grant due to the fact that they failed some courses. Despite all these problems, they described the Erasmus program as a valuable opportunity and stated they would participate again if they had a chance.

### **5.3. Conclusion**

As a result of globalization, the life in the 21st century and the dynamics of education have changed considerably. Bloom (2008) states that the education at all levels has been a vital component of the successful globalization progress. Consequently, the teachers, who are described as the communicator, educator, evaluator, an educated human being and the agent of socialization by Fillmore and Snow (2000) have an important role at this point. In order for teachers to take on these functions, they need to adapt themselves according to the needs of the 21st century so that they can help their students. International student mobility and study abroad programs can have a great impact on the development of prospective EFL teachers. Especially with the prevalence of the Erasmus exchange program, which was launched in 1987 in Europe and in which Turkey participated in 2004, it became easier for Turkish students to have study abroad experience.

The current study investigated whether and to what extent Turkish prospective EFL teachers believe Erasmus exchange program to have contributed to their academic, language,

social, cultural, personal, and career development. Also, the problems that they encountered before, during and after the Erasmus mobility were examined. In order to determine the participants of this study, Criterion Sampling method was used. 37 prospective teachers studying English Language Teaching (ELT) at Dokuz Eylül University who participated in the Erasmus Exchange Program in the academic years of 2014-2015, 2015-2016, 2016-2017, 2017-2018, 2018-2019, and 2019-2020 took part in the study. The host countries of the participants are as follows: Poland, Hungary, Portugal, Belgium, Finland, Spain, Denmark, Lithuania, and Latvia. The data collection tools consisted of an online survey developed by Önen (2017) and semi-structured interview questions in accordance with the purpose of the study. Since the mixed method design was adopted, both quantitative and qualitative tools were implemented. By this way, it was aimed to gain a broader perspective on the phenomenon. First, an online survey was completed by 37 participants. Then, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 volunteer participants via Skype and each session lasted nearly 40 minutes for every individual. The data collection procedure was completed in eight weeks. The second part of the survey, which consisted of Likert-scale, multiple choice, and rank-order scale questions, was analysed quantitatively in terms of frequencies and percentages. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed as spoken in Turkish through Verbatim transcription technique and translated by the researcher. A qualitative analysis software called MAXQDA (2020) was used to assist with the content analysis. The results of the quantitative and qualitative data are as follows:

1. The quantitative and the qualitative data showed that participating in the Erasmus program contributed most to the personal and cultural development of the prospective EFL teachers.
2. The quantitative findings revealed that Erasmus program had positive impact on the language development of the majority of the participants, and qualitative findings showed that their language development was mostly in terms of speaking skill and fluency development.
3. Both the quantitative and qualitative findings indicated that the Erasmus program also contributed to the social development of the participants. They formed many international friendships and joined a wide range of social activities during their mobility.
4. The quantitative data showed that the Erasmus program had the least impact on the academic and career development of the participants. However, the qualitative data

suggested that some participants gained valuable academic skills and regarded the Erasmus program as a beneficial experience for their career prospect. It should be pointed out that the opinions of the participants about the contributions of the program to their academic and career development varied based upon some factors such as the education system of the host country, the quality of the courses at the host institution, or the priorities of the participants during their mobility period.

5. The findings indicated that the prospective EFL teachers encountered various problems before, during, and after the Erasmus mobility. The quantitative data revealed that the participants regard the pre-Erasmus as the most problematic process. Also, the qualitative data showed that they encountered more numerous problems during their mobility period such as academic, financial, and socialization problems. However, they stated that the problems that they encountered during the Erasmus process were not as stressful as the problems in the pre-Erasmus process. Excessive paper work, visa procedure, preparing the learning agreement, and most importantly, dealing with these issues with a lack of information and insufficient guidance were challenging and overwhelming according to the participants.
6. Although the post-Erasmus process was not perceived as problematic as before and during the Erasmus process, the qualitative data revealed that the main problem encountered in the post-Erasmus process was “post-Erasmus syndrome” which can be described as the difficulty experienced by the participants in adapting to their old lifestyle in the home country and school again.

#### **5.4. Implications of the Study**

According to the findings of the research, it is obvious that the Erasmus program has positive impact on the development of the prospective EFL teachers in many respects. Thus, more students should be encouraged to join the Erasmus program. However, it is also obvious that there are various problems encountered by the participants throughout the Erasmus program. Although the participants of this study were happy with their experience in spite of the problems, there may be some students who feel discouraged to apply the program or even worse, renounce their rights to participate in the program due to the complex process.

Considering the high level of bureaucratic problems experienced by the participants in the Erasmus process, the formal procedure should be simplified in order to make the

application process easier. Also, pre-Erasmus courses should be designed by the Erasmus coordinators in order to provide the participants with sufficient guidance throughout the process.

In addition, nearly all participants in the study reported that their monthly grant was not enough; therefore, the amount of grants should be revised. It is proved in many research that more and more students from moderate socio-economic background have a chance to study abroad thanks to the Erasmus program. That's why, it seems essential to increase the grant amount to minimize the financial problems faced by the participants.

Although the Erasmus program is a "study-abroad" program, some participants encountered various academic problems during their mobility. Also, the quality of the education provided by the host institution plays a vital role in the academic contributions of the Erasmus program. In order to maximize the contributions and minimize the problems, the Erasmus offices should choose the institutions to make agreement with more meticulously and solve the mismatches between the curricula.

Finally, orientation programs should be organized by the Erasmus offices in order to inform the Erasmus participants about the potential problems they will encounter before, during and after the Erasmus mobility as well as the coping strategies that they could use when they need. The previous Erasmus participants who completed their mobility period can also join these meetings to share their experience with the Erasmus candidates. By this way, the participants can feel more prepared and encouraged to get the utmost gain out of their Erasmus experience.

### **5.5. Suggestions for Further Research**

This study is limited to 37 prospective EFL teachers studying at Dokuz Eylül University. It cannot be generalized to all Turkish prospective EFL teachers. In the literature, there is limited number of research which focus solely on the prospective EFL teachers' Erasmus experiences. Thus, further research can be conducted with more prospective EFL teachers studying in different parts of Turkey. Additionally, in order to gain a different perspective on the issue, the Erasmus program can be investigated through the eyes of foreign prospective EFL teachers who came to Turkey in the framework of the Erasmus program.

Also, this study investigated the contributions of the Erasmus program and the problems encountered in the process with a holistic point of view by relying merely on the participants' perceptions. In further research, a pre-test and post-test design can be adopted to analyze the phenomenon empirically. Moreover, for further research, prospective EFL teachers who did not participate in the Erasmus program can be included in order to explore if there is a difference between the development of the Erasmus and non-Erasmus students. Similarly, a comparison between Turkish and foreign prospective EFL teachers' Erasmus experience can be made in order to examine if the impact of the program changes based on the nationality of the participants.



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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1. Academic Background of the MA Student

Kişisel Bilgiler			
Name and Surname	Ayperi SAL İLHAN		
E-mail			
Foreign Language(s)	English		
Field	ELT		
Öğrenim Bilgileri			
	University	Department	Year
Undergraduate Degree	Dokuz Eylül University	English Language Teaching	2013 - 2017
Dissertation title	Investigation on the Contributions of Erasmus Exchange Program to Turkish Prospective EFL Teachers and the Problems Encountered During the Process		
Supervisor	Assist. Prof. Dr. Gülşah KÜLEKÇİ		

## Appendix 2. Research Ethics Committee Approval



T.C.  
DOKUZ EYLÜL ÜNİVERSİTESİ  
Buca Eğitim Fakültesi



Sayı : 85316909- -E.73936  
Konu : Tez Uygulaması Hakkında(Ayperi  
SAL)

25/08/2020

### DAĞITIM YERLERİNE

İlgi : 30.07.2020 tarih ve 3275 sayılı yazınız.

Üniversitemiz Eğitim Bilimleri Enstitüsü Yabancı Diller Eğitimi Anabilim Dalı İngilizce Öğretmenliği Yüksek Lisans Programı 2017950002 numaralı öğrencisi Ayperi SAL'ın "Erasmus Değişim Programının Türk İngilizce Öğretmen Adaylarına Katkılarının ve Program Sürecinde Karşılaşılan Problemleri İncelenmesi" konulu tez çalışması kapsamında Yabancı Diller Eğitimi Bölümünde tez uygulama yapma isteği uygun bulunmuştur. Bilgilerinizi ve gereğini arz ederim.

Prof.Dr. Cenk KEŞAN  
Dekan V.

Dağıtım:  
Gereği:  
Eğitim Bilimleri Enstitüsü Müdürlüğüne

Bilgi:  
Hukuk Müşavirliğine



Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi – Buca Eğitim Fakültesi  
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Kep Adresi: [dokuzeyluluniversitesi@hs01.kep.tr](mailto:dokuzeyluluniversitesi@hs01.kep.tr)  
Bu belge 5070 sayılı e-İmza Kanununa göre BUCA EĞİTİM FAKÜLTESİ DEKANLIĞINA - Prof.Dr. Ercan AKPINAR Vekili Prof.Dr. Cenk KESAN tarafından 25.08.2020 tarihinde e-imzalanmıştır.

Bilgi İçin İrtibat:  
Belma KOÇAK  
Dahili:

E-Posta: [belma.kocak@deu.edu.tr](mailto:belma.kocak@deu.edu.tr)



Prof.Dr. Ercan AKPINAR Vekili Prof.Dr. Cenk KESAN

### Appendix 3. Permission of Data Collection Tool

In this research, as a data collection tool, the online survey which was prepared by Önen (2017) was used. Necessary permission from Önen was taken through e-mail.



SERAP ÖNEN

Alıcı: ben

28 Nis 2018 11:39



İletiyi çevir

Türkçe için kapat

Merhaba tabiki yardımcı olmak isterim. Sorularımı bulup size mail atacağım

26 Nis 2018 Per, saat 16:00 tarihinde Ayperi Sal şunu yazdı:

...

Assist. Prof. Serap ÖNEN  
Istanbul University  
H.A. Y. Faculty of Education  
Department of English Language Teaching

#### Appendix 4. Informed Consent Form

### BİLGİLENDİRİLMİŞ ONAM FORMU

Bu formun amacı katılmanız rica edilen araştırma ile ilgili olarak sizi bilgilendirmek ve katılmanız ile ilgili izin almaktır.

Bu kapsamda “Investigation on the Contributions of the Erasmus Exchange Program to Turkish Prospective EFL Teachers and the Problems Encountered During the Process (Erasmus Değişim Programının Türk İngilizce Öğretmen Adaylarına Katkılarının ve Program Sürecinde Karşılaşılan Problemlerin İncelenmesi)” başlıklı çalışma Ayperi SAL tarafından **gönüllü katılımcılarla** yürütülmektedir. Araştırma sırasında sizden alınacak bilgiler gizli tutulacak ve sadece araştırma amaçlı kullanılacaktır. Araştırma sürecinde konu ile ilgili her türlü soru ve görüşleriniz için aşağıda iletişim bilgisi bulunan araştırmacıyla görüşebilirsiniz. Bu araştırmaya katılmama hakkınız bulunmaktadır. **Bu formu onaylamanız, araştırmaya katılım için onam verdiğiniz anlamına gelecektir.**

#### Çalışmaya Katılım Onayı:

*Bu araştırmaya kendi isteğimle, hiçbir baskı ve zorlama olmaksızın katılmayı ve verdiğim bilgilerin bilimsel amaçlı yayımlarda kullanılmasını kabul ediyorum.*

#### Katılımcının

Adı-Soyadı:

İmzası:

Tarih: ----/----/----

#### Araştırmacının

Adı-Soyadı: Ayperi SAL

İmzası:

Tarih: ----/----/----

## Appendix 5. Online Survey

1. Erasmus deneyiminizi hangi ve eğitim-öğretim yılında yaşadınız? Kaç ay süreyle kaldınız? Hibeli mi hibesiz mi gittiniz? Hangi ülke/şehir/üniversite/kuruma gittiniz?

Adınız / Soyadınız	<input type="text"/>
Mezun / Öğrenci	<input type="text"/>
Kadın / Erkek	<input type="text"/>
Hangi Eğitim-Öğretim Yılında gittiniz (örn. 2018-2019)	<input type="text"/>
Hibeli / Hibesiz	<input type="text"/>
Ülke	<input type="text"/>
Şehir	<input type="text"/>
Üniversite veya Kurum	<input type="text"/>
Mail adresiniz	<input type="text"/>
Telefon numaranız	<input type="text"/>

2. Erasmus deneyiminizi akademik, sosyal, kültürel, ve bireysel gelişiminize, dil edininimize ve kariyer oluşturmaya etkisi bakımından değerlendiriniz.

	Hiçbir etkisi olmadı	Çok az etkisi oldu	Etkisi oldu	Çok etkisi oldu
Akademik gelişim	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Dil edinimi	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sosyalleşme	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Kültürel birikim	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bireysel gelişim	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Kariyer	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. Erasmus sürecinde (Erasmus başvuru dönemi, Erasmus yaparken, Erasmus dönüşü) zorluklar yaşadınız mı?

- Çok zorlandım
- Zorlandım
- Biraz zorlandım
- Hiç zorlanmadım

4. Erasmus deneyiminizi 3 dönemde ele alırsak, sizi en çok zorlayan dönemden en az zorlayan döneme doğru 1,2,3 şeklinde bir sıralama yapınız. En çok zorlandığınız döneme 1 veriniz.

	1	2	3
Erasmus öncesi	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Erasmus yaparken	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Erasmus dönüşü	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. Erasmus öncesinde sizi zorlayan durumlar neydi? (Başvuru sürecinden gidene kadar olan süreç) Lütfen detaylı açıklayınız. Zorluk yaşamadıysanız belirtiniz.

6. Erasmus yaparken gittiğiniz ülkede, okulda, sosyal çevrede, yurttan (akademik, ekonomik, duygusal, kültür şoku, sosyalleşme vb.) sizi zorlayan durumlar neydi? Lütfen detaylı açıklayınız. Zorluk yaşamadıysanız belirtiniz.

7. Erasmus dönüşü sizi zorlayan durumlar neydi? (derslerin eşleşmesi, adaptasyon, vb.) Lütfen detaylı açıklayınız. Zorluk yaşamadıysanız belirtiniz.

8. Dil sorunu yaşadınız mı? Kendinizde eksik bulduğunuz beceriler (dil yetisi bakımından) nelerdi?

Yabancı dil bağlamında (İngilizce, Almanca, İspanyolca, vb.) size bir katkısı olduğunu düşünüyor musunuz?

9. Yaşamış olduğunuz iyi ve kötü tecrübelerinizden yola çıkarak Erasmus yapacak arkadaşlarınıza ne gibi önerilerde bulunursunuz?



## Appendix 6. Semi-structured Interview Questions

### Turkish

1. Erasmus programına katılma sebepleriniz nelerdi?
2. Daha önce yurtdışına çıkmış mıydınız?
3. Gideceğiniz ülkeyi ve okulu seçerken nelere dikkat ettiniz?
4. Erasmus programının akademik, dil, sosyal, kültürel, kişisel ve kariyer gelişimize katkı sağladığını düşünüyor musunuz? Bu katkılar neler?
5. Hareketlilik öncesi yaşadığınız zorluklar nelerdi?
6. Hareketlilik esnasında yaşadığınız zorluklar nelerdi?
7. Hareketlilik sonrasında yaşadığınız zorluklar nelerdi?
8. Bu sorunları nasıl çözdünüz?
9. Erasmus programı sonrasında hayatınızda neler değişti?

### English

1. What were your reasons to join the Erasmus program?
2. Have you been abroad before?
3. What did you pay attention to when choosing your country and school?
4. Do you think Erasmus program has contributed to your academic, language, social, cultural, personal, and career development? If yes, what are these contributions?
5. What were the problems you had before the mobility?
6. What were the problems you had during the mobility?
7. What were the problems you experienced after the mobility?
8. How did you solve these problems?
9. What has changed in your life after the Erasmus + program?

