Available online at www.ejal.eu
http://dx.doi.org/10.32601/ejal.599613

Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics, 5(2), 323–339

EJAL
Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics

Reflections of Incoming Erasmus+ Exchange Students at a Turkish University Context

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Received 29 January 2019 | Received in revised form 31 May 2019 | Accepted 31 July 2019

APA Citation:
Şener, S., & Gün, S. (2019). Reflections of incoming Erasmus+ exchange students at a Turkish university context. *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics, 5*(2), 323–339. **Doi: 10.32601/ejal.599613**

Abstract

This study aims to shed light on the preferences and problems of Erasmus+ exchange programme students before and during the mobility process. The research was organized in qualitative research method phenomenological design. The participants of the study were 21 incoming Erasmus+ students having studied at a state university in Turkey at 2015-2016 academic year. The required data were collected with a survey in open-ended questionnaire format. The collected data were analyzed with descriptive content analysis technique. Students' answers were described, organized and explained to interpret the context. Participants' preferences gave information about the reasons for choosing the country and the university while their impressions were covering the first impressions after arriving in Turkey, information about Turkey, Turkish culture, Turkish university, and expectations about education. The findings also gave information about the problems or difficulties and previous experiences of the participants. Lastly, some implications and suggestions were derived from the statements of Erasmus+ programme students.

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Keywords: Erasmus+ students, exchange students, student mobility, target culture.

1. Introduction

Exchange programmes bring the opportunity to combine the educational process with intercultural and international interaction by presenting the option of studying a period of time of university programme at another partner university. By this means, both undergraduate and graduate degree students of partner universities are able to experience educational and cultural outcomes of university instruction at another higher education institute. Additionally, these students are capable of developing their foreign language skills by having an education in English. As the native

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language of all these participants is different from English, they need to use English as a lingua franca in order to attend their courses at the university. Additionally, they use English as a lingua franca in order to survive and communicate in daily life both outside and inside the university. With the help of the Erasmus+ exchange programme, the participants have the opportunity to develop their English language skills and to experience the target culture at the same time.

Exchange programmes are regarded as one way of internalization of the higher education system, therefore, higher education institutions are trying to send more students abroad and receive more exchange programme students in order to cater for exchange students' intercultural competence, develop their foreign language proficiency and ensure an international education atmosphere. To illustrate, according to The Law on Higher Education of Turkish Republic (CoHE, 2000) Article 4 Item C, one of the aims of higher education in Turkey is about internalization and international recognition of Turkish higher education institutions:

> "As higher educational institutions, to carry out studies and research of high academic level, to promote knowledge and technology, to disseminate scientific findings to assist progress and development at the national level, and, through cooperation with national and international institutions, to become recognized members of the academic world and contribute to universal, contemporary progress."

In relation with this aim, Turkish Council of Higher Education (CoHE) is within the Bologna process. The Bologna Declaration was signed on June 19, 1999, by 29 European countries in order to administrate the intergovernmental reform process and consequently ensure the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010 (CoHE, 2018).

The Turkish CoHE administers three mobility programmes; Erasmus Exchange Programme, Mevlana Exchange Programme and Farabi Exchange Programme. According to the Turkish CoHE (2018) "The Erasmus+ Programme is a European programme for student exchange and the programme gives university students an opportunity of studying a period of minimum 3 months and maximum 12 months at a higher education institute of another European country with grant supplied by European Union." The Mevlana Exchange Programme is an alternative for the Erasmus+ exchange programme and is organized and granted directly by the Turkish CoHE. The Farabi Exchange Program aims to exchange students and academic staff only between institutes of the Turkish Higher Education for a period of one or two semesters.

Upon briefly examining the mobility process, it is apparent that the Turkish CoHE makes an effort to develop the mobility and internationalization process of the Turkish Higher Education system so that the Turkish CoHE strengthen its place inside the European Higher Education Area. Another fact is that Turkey is a partner country in Erasmus+ Exchange Programme although it is not a member of European Union.

1.1. Literature Review

The term Erasmus stands for the phrase of **E**u**R**opean Community **A**ction **S**cheme for the **M**obility of **U**niversity **S**tudents. The Erasmus Exchange Programme was named after Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus (1466-1536) who was a Dutch philosopher, theologian, humanist and significant scholar of Renaissance period (Schoeck, 1991). The Erasmus Exchange Programme was established in 1987 and is a large scale education and training programme, with a large budget of €14.7 billion. The Erasmus Programme presents the opportunity of mobility to over 4 million participants (European Commission, 2016). The Erasmus programme has been called with different titles during different periods, namely; Socrates Programme (l994-2006), Lifelong Learning Programme (2007-2013), and Erasmus+ (plus) Programme (20l4-2020). Throughout this study, Erasmus Programme is regarded as Erasmus+ Programme.

In order to examine the process and benefits of the Erasmus+ Programme, several studies were conducted in different countries. Some of these studies examined directly the process while the others reported experiences and reflections of the participants. For example, Lipowski (2012) focused on problems of foreign Erasmus+ students studying in Poland and reported that main problems were related with the language barrier, cultural differences, the study program, the size of cities and the limited number of cultural events organized in English. A similar study was conducted in Lithuania by Užpalienė and Vaičiūnienė (2012) with the reflections of 20 Erasmus students from 13 countries. The qualitative study aimed to examine the experiences and the reflections of students studying and living in an environment which is culturally diverse and multilingual. The results of the study indicated that students had the opportunity to study in a multicultural community, to develop intercultural communication, to improve themselves in personal and professional aspects and to practice a foreign language. On the other hand, the problems were mainly about language competence, complex subjects, academic practices and regulations, and the unfamiliar environment.

Another study administrated by Tekin and Hiç Gencer (2013) was conducted to examine the effects of the programme by concentrating on the possible changes in the perspectives of students, assessments of practices and impressions of educational and professional topics. The participants of the study stressed the importance of the Erasmus+ programme and also pointed out that their self-confidence increased due to the Erasmus+ programme. The students also developed transnational social relationships and repositioned themselves during the process. In addition, Şahin (2017) conducted a mixed methods design research about the cross-cultural adaptation level of Turkish Erasmus+ students. As reported by the researcher, Turkish Erasmus+ students developed cross-cultural adaptation but they faced problems in foreign language proficiency.

In another study which was conducted in the Turkish context, Yıldırım and İlin (2013) paid attention to the reflections on cultural adaptation of pre-service Turkish Erasmus+ students who were studying at the English Language Teaching Department of a Turkish university. By examining the experiences of participants, Yıldırım and İlin revealed that Turkish Erasmus+ students confronted with various problems which were related with their feelings, behaviors and cognition.

With related research studies in the literature, the main interest is the experience of home countries' students, for example, the experience of Turkish Erasmus+ students who study at a foreign university. However, the present study handles the subject from a different perspective to fill the gap in the literature by focusing on the reflections of incoming Erasmus+ students who prefer to study in Turkey.

1.2. Aim of the research

The aim of this study is to shed light on the preferences and problems of Erasmus+ exchange programme students before and during the mobility process. In relation to this aim, the following research questions were stated.

1. What are the reasons of the country and university preferences of Erasmus+ incoming students?
2. What problems or difficulties did the participants have in the host country?
3. What were the expectations about academic matters and the problems they encountered?

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

In this study a qualitative research method, phenomenological design was employed in order to provide a detailed description of the phenomena. In phenomenological design, the main focus is on the fact which is known but still needs an in-depth and detailed understanding (Creswell, 2007). "The phenomena can emerge in various forms, such as events, experiences, perceptions, orientations, concepts and situations in the world we live in. We can encounter these phenomena in various ways in our daily lives. But this familiarity does not mean that we fully understand the facts. It is intended to investigate events that we are not entirely unfamiliar to us at the same time" (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008, p. 73). In the same way, Erasmus+ exchange programme is known and heard by the students and members of higher education institutions and the higher education institutions host hundreds of Erasmus+ incoming students. Therefore, examining the reasons of their preferences, problems or difficulties in the host country, the expectations about academic matters, and the encountered problems may help us to understand the Erasmus+ exchange programme and the Erasmus+ incoming students in detail.

2.2. Participant characteristics

In order to collect in-depth and detailed reflections about Erasmus+ exchange programme, 21 incoming Erasmus+ exchange students participated in the study. The participants studied at a state university in Western Turkey in 2015-2016 academic year. A survey was conducted in the spring term of the same academic year. As presented in Table 1, 20 participants studied for bachelor's degree while one participant studied for a graduate level. Also, 6 participants were male and 15 participants were female. The ages of the participants were between 20 and more than 25.

Table 1: Demographic data of Erasmus+ students

Variable	Type	Number
Grade	Bachelors	20
	Graduate	1
Gender	Male	6
	Female	15
Age	20	3
	21	4
	22	5
	23	4
	25 + <	5
	Mean	22.57

Additionally, the academic programs of participants are given in Table 2. Most of the students studied Tourism and Education. There are two participants on Sociology and Biology programs. There was only one student each for programs of Computer Science, Administrative Science and Economics, Geology and Humanities.

Table 2: Fields of study

Field	Number
Tourism	7
Education	6
Sociology	2
Biology	2
Computer Science	1
Administrative Science and Economics	1
Geology	1
Humanities	1
Total	21

The participants were from eight different countries. Five students came from the Czech Republic, four from Lithuania, four from Austria, and three from Germany. Only one participant each from Slovakia, Poland, France, and Italy (Figure 1).

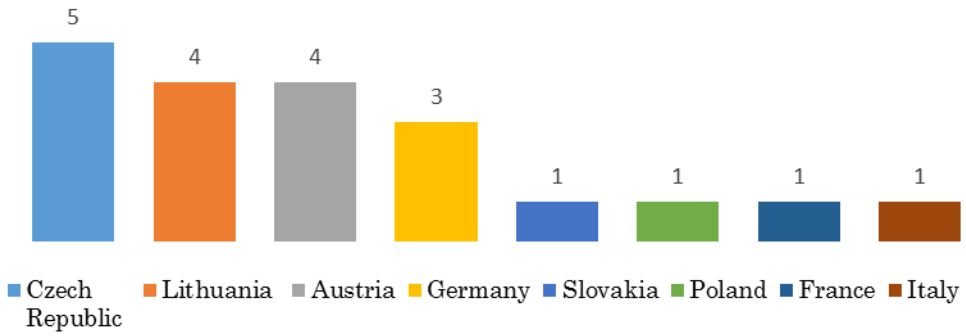


Figure 1: Country of origin for Erasmus+ students

2.3. Instruments

In relation with the aim of the research, data were collected with an instrument which was adapted from Lipowski (2012) and developed by getting expert opinions. The questionnaire is composed of two parts. The first part includes questions about biographical data, while the second part includes seven open-ended questions about the Erasmus+ exchange programme. The language of the questionnaire is English functioning as a lingua franca as it is the means of communication among participants and between participants and researchers. The first part of the questionnaire aims to collect information about age, gender, department, level of education, the period of study in Turkey, the country of origin, other countries visited, and other languages in use with level. The second part asks for reasons for choosing the exchange country and university, information about exchange countries and universities, expectations and reality, problems and difficulties, and participants' experiences.

2.4. Data Analysis

Participants' reflections which were collected with the survey were analyzed in a descriptive content analysis manner in order to explain the reflections of participants in an organized manner. The major aim in descriptive content analysis is to demonstrate tendencies and descriptive content analysis makes use of the descriptive statistics, frequencies and percentages (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The process of qualitative data analysis is composed of stages such as coding the data, categorizing the codes, and examining the phenomenon. At the first step, data coming from the reflections were organized and coded in a systematic way. Codes were derived from the key elements of the items of the questionnaire. This process is regarded as 'the process of categorizing and sorting data' (Charmaz, 1983, p. 111).

After producing the codes from student answers, researchers categorized the codes according to research questions and relations between codes. Then, codes and categories were tabulated together.

Two important issues of qualitative research design are reliability and validity (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). To increase validity, the research method should be reproducible and consistent. The research procedure of this study can be organized again as all steps of data collection and analysis are stated clearly. Additionally, the items of the survey were found to be consistent with each other by two experts. To increase reliability, both researchers coded and categorized student answers separately in relation with the expert opinions. For this study, the formula described in Miles and Huberman (1994) was benefitted and the inter-rater reliability was found as 90%.

3. Results

According to reflections of the Erasmus+ exchange students, they possess some positive attitudes for studying in Turkey and studying at a Turkish university. Additionally, the reflections of the participants indicated that they obtained some information about Turkey, Turkish culture, and the university from several resources such as friends, teachers, televisions, internet, books, and newspapers.

When the expectations regarding the study programme and attitudes of instructors and peers are taken into consideration, the participants possess some positive and some negative reflections toward the study programme and attitudes of instructors and peers. Only a few participants talked about some problems related to language, transportation, and official documentation at school and some government offices. The following section is dedicated to the analysis of each question in the questionnaire. The themes, categories and codes of questions are indicated with frequencies in brackets.

3.1. Reasons for Choosing the Country

3.1.1. Question 1: What are your reasons for choosing to study in Turkey?

Table 3: Definition of the first theme, categories and codes

Theme	Categories	Codes
Reasons for Choosing the Country	Cultural Reasons (16)	A different country and cultural experience (12)
		Turkish cuisine (2)
		Learning about Turkish culture (1)
		Meeting with new people (1)
	Geographical Reasons (12)	Good weather condition (6)
		Improving Turkish (4)
		Being a big country (1)
		Being a Mediterranean country (1)
	Unintentional Reasons (3)	Coordinator's choice (1)
		Not having a specific reason (1)
		Having one exchange partner university (1)
	Educational Reasons (2)	The quality of education (1)
		Interest in studying the Middle East and Islamic religion (1)
	Economic Reasons (1)	A cheap country (1)

Erasmus+ exchange students stated that they were interested in studying in Turkey because of cultural reasons (16), geographical reasons (12), unintentional reasons (3), educational reasons (2) and economic reasons (1) as illustrated in Table 3.

The codes constructing the category of cultural reasons includes a different country and cultural experience (12), Turkish cuisine (2), learning about Turkish culture (1), and meeting with new people (1). Geographical reasons consist of good weather condition (6), improving Turkish (4), being a big country (1), and being in a Mediterranean country (1). The codes of unintentional reasons are confirming the coordinator's choice (1), not having a specific reason (1) and having one exchange partner university. Educational reasons are about the quality of education (1) and interest in studying the Middle East and Islamic religion (1). One participant stated that Turkey is a cheap country as an economic reason. Three excerpts which were chosen among the reflections of participants were given below as first-hand examples to indicate the views of the participants.

Excerpts from participants:

P3: I have visited Istanbul and I fell in love with that city. So I wanted to explore more from Turkey. And I also wanted to learn more about Turkish culture and enjoy warmer weather.

P12: To make cultural experiences, get to know other landscapes and enlarge my mind in thinking of people from different origin.

P21: I want to learn the language, interest in culture.

3.2. Reasons for Choosing the University

3.2.1. Question 2: What are your reasons for choosing to study at this University?

Table 4: Definition of the second theme, categories and codes

Theme	Categories	Codes
Reasons for choosing the university	Cultural Reasons (16)	A different country and cultural experience (12)
		Learning about Turkish culture (1)
		Turkish cuisine (2)
		Meeting with new people (1)
	Geographical Reasons (12)	Weather conditions (4)
		Natural beauties (4)
		Exotic destination (2)
		Being an ideal location (2)
	Obligations (5)	Being the only partner university (3)
		The choice of the coordinator (1)
		No specific reason (1)
	Recommendations (4)	Friend Recommendation (2)
		Teacher Recommendation (2)
	Socio-economic reasons (3)	Not expensive or crowded (3)
	Educational reasons (5)	Good match between topics (2)
		Quality of education (1)
		Studying Middle East and Islamic studies (1)
		Improving Turkish (1)

As it can be seen in Table 4, the reasons for choosing to study at this university are collected under six headings; cultural reasons (16), geographical reasons (12), obligations (5), recommendations (4), socio-economic reasons (3), and educational reasons (5).

Cultural reasons are stated as experiencing a different country and having cultural experience (12), learning about Turkish culture (1), trying Turkish cuisine (2), and meeting with new people (1). Geographical reasons are related to weather conditions in the target country (4), natural beauties (4), being an exotic destination (2), and being an ideal location (2). However, obligatory reasons of university preference are not related to the aspects of the target university, instead, they are about the sending university. Being the only partner university (3) and the choice of the coordinator (1) are the main reasons of this category, while one participant preferred not to give a specific reason (1). When the category of recommendations (4) are examined, there are two codes; friend's recommendation (2) and teacher's recommendation (2). Another category is socio-economic reasons and there is one code of being not expensive or crowded. Last category is for educational reasons (5) and the codes of this category are given as good match between topics (2), quality of education (1), studying Middle East and Islamic studies (1), and improving Turkish (1). Three excerpts taken from participants are given below as examples.

Excerpts from participants:

P7: One of my teacher suggested me this university and place in Turkey. Also, the programs and lectures matched in my university and in this university.

P12: It was one of our partner universities and the only one in Turkey. I heard a lot of good things about coming here and got suggestions from students who had been here.

P13: Lectures matched very well, Recommendations from teachers, Ideal location, In this region of Turkey English is used widely.

3.3. Obtaining Information

3.3.1. Question 3: What have you learnt about Turkey, Turkish culture, and this university before coming here? How did you get this information? (Friends, internet, etc.)

Table 6: Definition of the third theme, categories and codes

Theme	Categories	Codes
Information about Turkey, Turkish culture, and university	Aspects of the country (17)	Basic information (6)
		Tourist Attraction (2)
		Daily life (7)
		Politics (2)
	Cultural affairs (16)	Turkish culture (5)
		History (4)
		Religion (3)
		Food (2)
		Festival (1)
		Customs (1)
	Language (4)	Aspects of Turkish language (4)
	University (3)	Aspects of Turkish university (3)

As indicated in Table 6, the reflections of participants about Turkey, Turkish culture, and the university before coming here were collected under four categories and they are aspects of the country (17), language (4), university (3), and cultural affairs (16). The first category of aspects of the country was composed of four main codes; basic information (6), tourist attraction (2), daily life (7), and politics (2). On the other hand, another category of cultural affairs included six codes; Turkish culture (5), history (4), religion (3), food (2), festivals (1), and customs (1). For language category (4), the only code is aspects of the Turkish language. Moreover, for the university category, again the only code is the aspects of the Turkish university. Participants reported that they obtained the related information about Turkey, Turkish culture, and the university before coming to Turkey from friends (both from their own country and Turkey), coordinator, teachers, parents, internet, TV, textbooks, school subjects, and personal experience. The following three excerpts are given to indicate the reflections of participants as samples.

Excerpts from participants:

P9: Turkey is a proud nation, with many people, with many nationalities. Culture is different, mostly because of different religion, and some small gestures which are mostly coming from old culture. Turkey is a country of many ancient cities, country of first civilization. I get this information from my text guide, teachers, Turkish classmates.

P6: I watched Turkish TV-series. I have Turkish friends. I research on the internet. I read online articles about Turkish culture. I learned about it in class.

P5: The capital, cities, Muslimans, Urfa, Pamukkale, Ataturk (the greatest man), your president, tv series (Muhtessem Yuzyil, Binbir Gece, Ask ve Ceza…), languages. About university…not much…however, my coordinator advised me to come here, as well my other teacher.

3.4. Expectations

3.4.1. Question 4: What were your expectations regarding the study programme, course contents, training, attitudes of instructors and peers, university offers, course hours?

Table 7: Definition of the fourth theme, categories and codes

Theme	Categories	Codes
Expectations about education	Education (17)	Language proficiency (2)
		Organized schedule (2)
		Simple topics/content (2)
		Demanding instruction (1)
		More courses offered (1)
		Attendance (1)
		Course content (1)
		Extra reading (1)
		Lecturer's language proficiency (1)
		No credit marks for MA (1)
		Relaxed system (1)
		Short course hours (1)
		Crowded classes (1)
		Complaints about classmates (1)
	Facilities (1)	Stadium (1)
	Free time (1)	No enough time to travel, discover around (1)
	No expectations (6)	No demand (6)

The reflections of participants related with the topics of education and instruction are evaluated under four main categories and are presented with their frequencies as education (17), facilities (1), and free time (1) in Table 7. Also, six participants preferred not to give any answers to this question and they are categorized under the title of no expectations (6). When the category of education was examined in depth, various codes were reached; codes of language proficiency, organized schedule and

simple topics/content come along with two frequencies. While the codes of language proficiency and organized schedule can be accepted as positive aspects, the code of simple topics/content can be regarded as negative criticism. Also, the category of education covers the following codes with one frequency each; demanding instruction, more courses offered, attendance, course content, extra reading, and lecturer's language proficiency, no credit marks for MA, relaxed system, short course hours, crowded classes, and complaints about classmates. These codes indicate both positive and negative aspects of the education system from the view point of Erasmus+ students. For the category of facilities, there exists one code, namely stadium. Additionally, for the code of free time, one participant makes a compliment with the code of no enough time to travel and discover around. The following excerpts are the statements of three participants and are given as samples.

Excerpts from participants:

P14: My only expectation was to progress in English since courses are in English here.

P20: Study program is suitable, hours that the courses start are suitable as well (not very early or late). Attitudes of lecturers are very good, we do many interesting and useful things which help to get useful experience.

P21: I expected everything to be a little bit more relaxed than in Germany, and I expected Turkish people to be late always (not true every time, but most of the times). I expected some insights into Turkish literature and culture. Unfortunately, the most interesting ... (masal, Hacivat ve Karagöz) weren't offered so I want a disappeared.

3.5. Problems

3.5.1. Question 5: What kind of problems or difficulties (if any) have you experienced since you arrived in Turkey? Give examples.

Table 8: Definition of the fifth theme, categories and codes

Theme	Categories	Codes
Problems or difficulties	Communication problems (9)	Turkish students' language problem (2)
		Interruption in communication (2)
		Language problem at official units (1)
		Language problem with local people (4)
	Personal problems (3)	Health problem (2)
		Transportation (1)
		Misunderstanding (1)
	Bureaucracy (2)	Official practices (1)
		Official documents (1)
	No problems (8)	None (8)

As presented in Table 8, there are four categories in order to examine the problems or difficulties after arriving in Turkey. The main problem is labelled as

communication problem (9) and then come the other categories; personal problems (3), bureaucracy (2), and no problems (8). Communication problems can be handled with four codes; Turkish students' language problem (2), interruption in communication (2), language problem at official units (1), and language problems with local people (4). The category of personal problems includes these three codes; health problems (2), transportation (1), and misunderstanding (1) each other in talks about daily language. The category of bureaucracy is composed of two codes; official practices (1) and official documents (1). Additionally, eight participants stated that they experienced no problems. The three excerpts below indicate the utterances of participants.

Excerpts from participants:

P1: It is not a problem, but I was really shocked when I tried to find help in university and a lot of students told me, that they don't speak English. I expected that most of the students speak English.

P7: I did not have many difficulties here, but at first in some situations, it was hard to communicate between local people because of the language barrier.

P9: Communication, when I arrived and no one was able to explain me properly where I should go. Bureaucracy, when I lost my credit card and my letter was stopped by a few days.

3.6. Previous Experiences

Question 6: Did you have any experience of living, working or studying with people from different cultures and languages before you came to Turkey? Give details.

When the interaction with the people from a different culture and with a different language was asked, 14 participants stated that they have already interacted with people from different cultures and languages and this makes the 67% of the total participants. Six participants, namely 28%, articulated that they haven't experienced any cultural interaction with someone from a different culture and language. Also, one of the participants preferred not to give any answers. The following Figure 2 illustrates the percentage of previous experience with people from different cultures and languages.

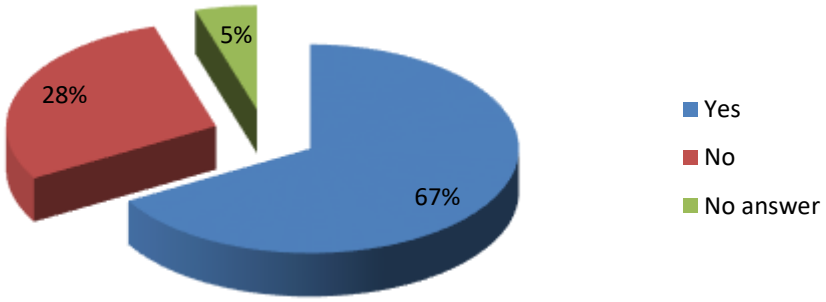


Figure 2: Experience with people from different cultures and languages

4. Discussion

This research study examined the preferences and problems of Erasmus+ exchange programme incoming students before and during mobility. It can be stated that cultural and geographical reasons are the main reasons why the participants of this study choose to study in Turkey and at this university. Cultural reasons are related with geographical reasons. Geography, food and festivals are some examples of the aspects of cultural understanding (Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein, & Colby, 2003). This finding is similar to a number of research studies. In Lipowski's (2012) study, the Erasmus+ students indicated that cultural reasons and differences were among the reasons for choosing Poland. Hedon (cited in Abu Jalalah, 1993, p. 132) also explained that many students are curious about knowing people and their lifestyles in other cultures. It can also be said that cultural interaction enables Erasmus+ students to enhance their linguistic and intercultural communicative competence (Jackson, 2011). Similarly, the participants stated that they wanted to improve their Turkish language skills, live in a different country and have cultural experience while meeting with new people. Besides, in their study, Teichler and Jahr (2001, p. 447) articulated that "Erasmus students believed that study abroad was most valuable in contributing to cultural enhancement, personality development and foreign language proficiency".

The results of the study revealed that education is the most stated expectation regarding the study programme, course contents, training, attitudes of instructors and peers, university offers, and course hours. Expectations of the participants focused on educational issues and contained topics such as courses, course contents, instruction, language proficiency, and system of the new university. These kinds of expectations can be regarded as being related with educational aspects of Erasmus+ programme. Teichler (1996) expressed that when students choose to study abroad, this period helps them adapt to a new culture and have a satisfactory education environment. In the same manner with Teichler, the participants of the study gave great importance to the education and educational environment.

According to the results, Erasmus+ students verbalized that they mostly experienced communication problems related with language problems with local people and Turkish students, language problems at official units, and communication interruption. This situation highlighted the importance of English as a lingua franca in Erasmus+ programme. The first languages of the participants and Turkish native people were different from English as well as they didn't share a common culture. Therefore, English as a lingua franca is used as a 'contact language' between the participants and Turkish native people (Firth, 1996, p. 240). English as a lingua franca is regarded as the medium of communication among the users of English whose first languages are different from each other and acting across the lingua-cultural boundaries (House, 1999; Seidlhofer, 2001). Erasmus+ students also added that they experienced personal problems and problems related to bureaucracy. Communication problems can be seen as a normal problem because they were in a different country with different language and culture. In a similar way, Lipowski (2012) expressed that Erasmus+ students in Poland experienced language trouble with Polish people and adaptation to a different culture. Besides, Şahin (2017) conducted a research study and stated that Turkish Erasmus+ students developed a favourable manner of cross-cultural adaptation but they faced with problems in the proficiency of English as a lingua franca. İçbay and Kocayörük (2011) also stated that students found it challenging to adapt to a new culture in terms of relationships between people. Since they got different cultural experiences, they were likely to employ different communication styles, they tended to develop their intercultural communication through these communication styles (Şahin, 2017).

Additionally, it was revealed that most of the participants had the experience of living, working or studying with people from different cultures and languages before their Erasmus+ experience in Turkey, and it can be concluded that Erasmus+ students maintain their intercultural experience.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the reflections of Erasmus+ exchange programme students and focused on the preferences, problems, previous experience with people from different cultures and languages, and expectations regarding the study programme, course contents, training, attitudes of instructors and peers, university offers, and course hours before and during the mobility process. The study was conducted in a qualitative research method phenomenological design and the required data were collected with an open-ended survey. Descriptive content analysis of the data indicated that the Erasmus+ exchange students possess positive attitudes towards studying in Turkey and studying at a Turkish university. The main reasons of country and university preference were stated as cultural and geographical reasons. Additionally, the participants specified that they mostly collected information about the aspects of the country and cultural affairs before the Erasmus+ experience. Also, the most stated expectations of the participants were related with education. When the problems of the participants were taken into consideration, most of the problems

were communication problems related with language problems with local people and Turkish students. This communication problems once again underlined the importance of English as a lingua franca and intercultural competence in Erasmus+ programme as it was stated by Konevas and Duoba (2007) previously. Besides that, the present study indicated that most of the participants had the experience of living, working or studying with people from different cultures and languages before the Erasmus+ programme and it may be concluded that Erasmus+ students maintain their intercultural experience and there may be a relationship between intercultural competence and Erasmus+ programme.

The reflections in this study may help to revise the practices and regulations related with Erasmus+ programme. Also, reported problems can be solved and aspects which are appreciated by incoming Erasmus+ students can be developed in relation to the findings. Further studies can be organized with more participants and qualitative data can be collected together with quantitative data.

Note

An abbreviated version of this article was presented at the 2nd International Symposium on Philosophy, Education, Arts and History of Science held on May 3-7, 2017 at Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University, Turkey.

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