# CHAPTER 6

## THE SATISFACTIONS, VIEWPOINTS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ATTENDING ERASMUS + PROGRAM

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## INTRODUCTION

The Erasmus+ Program allows young groups from various countries to gather and conduct short-term joint projects. In a youth exchange, you might anticipate participating in activities such as workshops, exercises, discussions, role-playing, outdoor activities, and more (EU Center for Education and Youth Programs, 2005). Students experiencing Erasmus+ tend to experience many other cultures, costumes, and lifestyles even after their first experience in a European country. Today, it is possible to talk about a similar Erasmus experience that goes beyond the experience of the country in which the students work and, in the lifestyle and student culture, connecting to and sharing daily life with students from other countries is part of the Erasmus experience (Dunkel & Teichler, 2006; Corbett, 2005). By utilizing such programs, students will likely find opportunities to learn about universities outside of Turkey and are encouraged to study and live in another country. Erasmus + seeks to establish what changes occurred in students' perspectives, their assessment of events, and their educational and professional outlook. This study aims to determine the satisfaction and views of university students experiencing at least an Exchange Program (Youth Pass, Mobility, Voluntary Service, etc.).

### Literature Review

In Europe, the concern about the mobility of students in universities is increasing each passing day (Altbach & Teichler, 2001; Corbett, 2003; Papatsiba, 2006). In order to create a shared European consciousness, the Lisbon Strategy promotes mobility throughout Europe as the primary objective. The Bologna Declaration aims to increase mobility among students and lecturers in every part of Europe. The Berlin Conference also emphasized that mobility is one of the main features of creating the European Higher Education field and the importance of academic, cultural,

political, social, and economic aspects in forming one Europe (EU Center for Education and Youth Programs, 2005). European mobility practices in higher education started in 1987 with pilot projects. Since 1995, mobility in the form of student/faculty exchange programs has been given a structural framework with the Socrates-Erasmus Program and has continued to grow gradually. The Erasmus Program focuses on higher education. The program's goals are to promote the quality of higher education in Europe and strengthen the European aspect. In the Socrates program, the highest budget is devoted to the Erasmus program; the highest percentage of the Erasmus program is allocated to the exchange of students and lecturers. The total number of students attending mobility is predicted to reach 3 million by 2011 (European Union, 2005). EU Delegation to Turkey Cooperation Department Head Gatti: " Half a million Turkish citizens benefited from the Erasmus Plus program between 2004-2015, and Turkey is amongst the most benefited countries participating in this program." The National Agency Director of Turkey, Mesut Kamiloğlu, stated that "Turkey joined the Erasmus Plus program 14 years ago, 26 thousand projects and nine million Euros were allocated as a resource" (From Erasmus, 2017, November 7).

The Erasmus program promotes cooperation between universities, provides an exchange of students and educators across Europe, and aims at academic recognition of studies and degrees achieved in participating countries. The regulation and management of the program is under the control of the EU Commission. The European Commission makes financial contributions to change by granting unrequited grants to contribute to the additional costs of the individuals benefiting from the change abroad. The Erasmus student exchange program allows students to study in a university or higher education institution for 3-12 months. However, the time spent by the student in other countries and his academic studies is recognized by the university where he is registered in his country. For this purpose, the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) was developed to solve the problems related to the recognition of the education received by various

higher education institutions and other education institutions in Europe and to support student mobility. Especially in recent years, the international mobility of students gaining qualifications at universities in Turkey, with European countries, establishing themselves as a target of the National Higher Education Policy (DPT, 2000).

It is very important to evaluate the expectation and satisfaction levels of the students who benefit from the Erasmus program utilizing objective tools and studies and to evaluate whether or not the Erasmus program has been reached. The results of the research on this subject, as well as the academic program, department, faculty, university, and country levels of the students, reveal their expectations and satisfaction levels, allowing a comparison of the quality, continuous monitoring, and review of the program. (Yağcı, E., et al. 2007) stated that the research at Hacettepe University indicated that most students going to Erasmus+ met their expectations regarding daily life, academic life, and support services. Executives in European universities conduct follow-up surveys to test student satisfaction levels (Figlewicz & Williams, 2005; Rekkedal & Qwist-Eriksen, 2003). Universities determine the satisfaction level of their students going to other countries. In addition, universities aim to develop the services offered to the students by determining their satisfaction level and the level of the students coming to their own. In the study of Papatsiba (2005) on the experience of 80 Erasmus students benefiting from the Erasmus program, he identified mobility makes it easier for students to cope with the challenges they meet in different environments, develop their own self-perceptions, increase self-confidence, take control of their lives, take risks, easily tolerated. Rathje (2007) states that interaction between countries builds linguistic and cultural acquaintances and ensures students are self-reliant and goal-oriented. According to Santos and Cunha (2018), the idea has evolved to include international communication, the promotion of student mobility, university collaboration, and the recognition of higher education certificates, which can all significantly contribute to realizing integration in education. In other words, being in different communities and cultures may change students'

perspectives positively (Arndt, 1984; Saliba, 1995). These programs make them more self-confident by providing a great educational and intercultural experience. A different study (Stronkhorst, 2005) stated that the level of student motivation and the quality of institutional support and service provided are two main factors in determining student achievements.

The goal of this study is to determine the satisfaction levels of the students going to study abroad through the Erasmus program from the University of Hakkari and returning to Turkey about the daily lives of students, their academic life and support services, and the suggestions of the students to the other students. According to this research, the university authorities can consider student satisfaction in their decisions about students. Information-based action can be taken to organize student services by providing data to the European Union office. The research findings can be shared with the students, and they can be provided with the ability to act realistically to determine their preferences and expectations. The research results on this subject, academic program, department, faculty, university, and country levels of the students reveal their expectations and satisfaction levels, allowing a comparison of the quality, continuous monitoring, and review of the program.

Research Question

In this study, the responses to the following questions were investigated:

1. What are the satisfaction levels of university students attending Erasmus+ Program?

2. What are the views of university students attending Erasmus+ Program?

3. What are their recommendations to stakeholders?

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This mixed-method study aims to obtain the views of university students who have been abroad as Erasmus students via a survey and an open-ended question. According to Creswell (2014), mixed-methods research incorporates aspects of both qualitative and quantitative research to answer the research topic

### Participants

The universe of this study is 26 students between 18-30 years of age at Hakkari University who are going abroad as Erasmus students and returning in the 2014-2024 academic year. Everyone who participated in the study did so for educational purposes. The study sample is 26 students who were reached with the "convenience sampling method "from non-probability sampling types. In addition, 10 were associate students, 12 were undergraduates, and four were graduate students. Due to time limitations, the sample was selected from easily accessible and practicable types. Convenience sampling is a method that accelerates research because, in this method, the researcher chooses a situation that is close and easy to access (Kılıç, 2013).

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Participants**

| Female | Male | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|
| N | % | n | % |
| 18 | 69 | 8 | 31 |

As Table 1 shows, this study had 18 (69%) female participants and 8 (31%) male participants ----------

**Data Instruments and Procedure**

The University of Hakkari External Relations Unit and Erasmus Coordinator ship Unit developed the questionnaire used in this study. The coordinator ship applies this questionnaire to determine the satisfaction of students going abroad within the scope of Erasmus+ to manage the process better. The researchers utilized this questionnaire to conduct a scientific study in this direction. The questionnaire consists of 30 multiple-choice questions and an open-ended question. Before starting the study, the researcher held an online meeting with the students participating in the Erasmus+ program and provided necessary information about the implementation process. The participants voluntarily participated in the study. Google forms created by the researcher were shared with the participants online, and they were allowed to do so. The students were informed that the questionnaire results would be shared with the European Union (EU) Office of the Hakkari University to allow a comparison of the quality, continuous monitoring, and review of the program, and students were informed about the application of the questionnaire.

**Data Analysis**

The frequency and percentage distributions of the responses to the survey items were obtained. The following path was followed in determining the students' satisfaction level and in the questionnaire's evaluation. The variation between the level of satisfaction and expectation was identified to assess the level of satisfaction with each item. The difference was determined, and the difference was assessed based on satisfaction level. In other words, the student's rating for his / her satisfaction with his / her level of satisfaction with an item was removed, and the variation was accepted as the level of satisfaction. The difference points for satisfaction vary between (-4) and (+4). The nine degrees in this range were divided into three interval values and converted to verbal expression, as in Table 2. In addition, the open-ended

question was analyzed, divided into themes and subthemes, and categorized under five sub-themes as in Table 23**.**

## FINDINGS

**Table 2. Primary motivations for studying abroad**

| | F | | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Experience different learning contents/curricula | 12 | | 46 |
| Developing social skills such as adaptability, problem-solving, curiosity | 6 | | 23 |
| To learn/develop a foreign language | | 8 | 31 |
| TOTAL | 26 | | 100 |

Table 2 shows that 46% of the participants' main motivation for studying abroad was to experience different learning contents /curricula. In addition, 31% of the participants aim to learn or develop a foreign language, and 23% aim to develop social skills such as adaptability, problem-solving, and curiosity**.**

**Table 3. Criteria for choosing the university**

| | F | % |
|---|---|---|
| Education quality, Reputation/rankings | 14 | 54 |
| Feedback from Erasmus+ graduates | 4 | 15.3 |
| Foreign Language, Country | 8 | 30.7 |
| **Total** | 26 | 100 |

As it is observed in Table 3, while 54% of the participants choose to go abroad because of the quality of education, reputation and rankings of the university; 30.7% of the participants' criteria was the foreign language and country and 15.3% of them choose these countries with regard to feedback they received from Erasmus+ graduates**.**

**Table 4. Students' thoughts related to the education they received with the Erasmus+ program**

| | Yes | No | Neutral | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| F | 20 | 2 | 4 | 26 |
| % | 77 | 7 | 16 | 100 |

Table 4 shows that while 77% of participants believe that they received a good education, 16% of them were neutral, and 7% percent of them thought that they did not receive a good education with the Erasmus+ program

**Table 5. The Erasmus+ program contributes positively to their personal development**

| | Yes | No | Neutral | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| F | 26 | 0 | 0 | 26 |
| % | 100 | 0 | 0 | 100 |

Table 5 shows that all the participants (100%) thought that the Erasmus+ program contributed positively to their personal development**.**

**Table 6. Their happiness to be in another country**

| | Yes | No | Neutral | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| F | 26 | 0 | 0 | 26 |
| % | 100 | 0 | 0 | 100 |

Table 5 shows that each study participant claimed they were happy to be in another country.

**Table 7. Their feelings to have the opportunity to get to know new cultures**

| | Yes | No | Neutral | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| F | 26 | 0 | 0 | 26 |
| % | 100 | 0 | 0 | 100 |

Table 7 shows that all of the participants felt lucky to have the opportunity to learn about new cultures.

**Table 8. Their thoughts of being in a foreign country**

| | Yes | No | Neutral | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| F | 26 | 0 | 0 | 26 |
| % | 100 | 0 | 0 | 100 |

Table 8 shows that 100% of the participants thought being in a foreign country was a positive experience**.**

**Table 9. Participants' thoughts on having the opportunity to be together with students from different cultures**

| | Yes | No | Neutral | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| F | 26 | 0 | 0 | 26 |
| % | 100 | 0 | 0 | 100 |

As illustrated in Table 9, each of the participants in this study felt lucky to be together with students from different

cultures.

**Table 10. Participants' thoughts on the Erasmus+ program in making a new circle of friends**

| | Yes | No | Neutral | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| F | 26 | 0 | 0 | 26 |
| % | 100 | 0 | 0 | 100 |

Table 10 shows that all the participants in this study believed that participating in the Erasmus+ program helped them make a new circle of friends**.**

**Table 11. The Erasmus+ program's effect on improving participants' sense of responsibility**

| | Yes | No | Neutral | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| F | 26 | 0 | 0 | 26 |
| % | 100 | 0 | 0 | 100 |

In table 11, it is clear that every participant in this study thought that Erasmus+ program has improved their sense of responsibility.

**Table 12. Participants' beliefs of the Erasmus+ program in improving their foreign language skills**

| | Yes | No | Neutral | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| F | 22 | 0 | 4 | 26 |
| % | 85 | 0 | 15 | 100 |

Table 12 shows that 85% of students believed the Erasmus+ program has improved their foreign language skills**.**

**Table 13. The Erasmus+ program impact on participants' future career plans**

| | Yes | No | Neutral | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| F | 20 | 0 | 6 | 26 |
| % | 77 | 0 | 23 | 100 |

As Table 13 shows, 77% of the students thought the Erasmus program had impacted their future career plans.

**Table 14. Participants' thoughts of the Erasmus+ program as a special experience**

| | Yes | No | Neutral | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| F | 26 | 0 | 0 | 26 |
| % | 100 | 0 | 0 | 100 |

Table 14 illustrates that every study participant believed the Erasmus program to add a unique experience to their CVs.

**Table 15. The participants' adaptation to the university they attended**

| | Yes | No | Neutral | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| F | 9 | 11 | 6 | 26 |
| % | 35 | 42 | 23 | 100 |

As observed in Table 15, while 35% of students stated they had difficulties adapting to the university they attended, 42% identified no challenges, and 23% were neutral about this issue.

**Table 16. The participants' satisfaction with the approach of the lecturers**

| | Yes | No | Neutral | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| F | 26 | 0 | 0 | 26 |
| % | 100 | 0 | 0 | 100 |

Table 16 shows that all of the participants in this study declared they were satisfied with the lecturers' approach at the university they attended in the Erasmus+ program.

**Table 17. The participants assess the physical conditions of the training areas, accommodation, transportation facilities, internet, and online**

| | Very Good | Good | Neutral/Bad | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| F | 12 | 8 | 6 | 26 |
| % | 46 | 31 | 23 | 100 |

**services**

Table 17 shows that while 46% of the students in this study assessed the physical conditions of the training areas, accommodations, transportation facilities, internet, and online services in the Erasmus+ program as "very good," 31% declared these issues as "good," and 23% declared them as "neutral/bad."

| | Yes | No | Sometimes | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| F | 4 | 14 | 8 | 26 |
| % | 15 | 54 | 31 | 100 |

**Table 18. Participants' ideas of financial difficulties**

As shown in Table 18, 54% of the students claimed that they did not have financial problems. On the other hand, 31% of students mentioned they sometimes had financial problems, and 15% claimed they had financial difficulties in Erasmus+ programs.

**Table 19. The participants' ideas about general expenses related to their mobility period**

| | 0-25% | 26-50% | 51-75% | 76-100% |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| F | 3 | 10 | 9 | 4 |
| % | 12 | 38 | 35 | 15 |

As regarded in Table 19, while 38% of students remarked that the Erasmus+ programs met 26-50% of their general expenses, 35% of them stated that it met 51-75%, 15% of them 76-100% and 12% of them 0-25%.

**Table 20. The problems participants experienced in the country they have been to. (More than one option can be marked)**

| | F | % |
|---|---|---|
| Economic problems | 10 | 39 |
| Foreign Language | 5 | 19 |
| Food and drink | 6 | 23 |
| Climate conditions, Cultural differences | 5 | 19 |
| **Total** | 26 | 100 |

Table 20 shows that 39% of the students remarked that they had economic problems in the Erasmus+ programs. In addition, 23% stated they had food and drink problems, 19% said they had foreign language problems, and 19% said they had problems with climate conditions and cultural differences.

**Table 21. Participants' satisfaction levels with their Erasmus+ mobility experience?**

| | Very Satisfied | Satisfied | Not Satisfied | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| F | 14 | 10 | 2 | 26 |
| % | 54 | 38 | 8 | 100 |

As observed in Table 21, 54% of students stated they were very satisfied, 38% were satisfied, and 8% were unsatisfied with their Erasmus+ mobility experience.

**Table 22. Participant's recommendations this experience to other students**

| | Yes | No | Neutral | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| F | 26 | 0 | 0 | 26 |
| % | 100 | 0 | 0 | 100 |

Table 22 illustrates that all the students participating in the Erasmus+ program recommended this experience to other students.

**Table 23. Participant's recommendations and comments for the sender and host higher education institutions**

| | F | % |
|---|---|---|
| Students Cultural Adjustment Process | 20 | 76 |
| Academic Support and Counseling | 22 | 84 |
| Cultural Interaction and Language Learning | 18 | 69 |
| Safety and Health Services | 15 | 57 |
| Cultural and Social Support | | |
| | | 69 |
| | 18 | |

In Table 23, most students involved in the Erasmus+ program recommended that higher education institutions offer support in cultural adaptation, academic counseling, cultural interaction, language training, security, health assurance, and social support.

## RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study aimed to find out the satisfaction and views of university students towards the Erasmus+ program attending to this program in advance. Based on the opinions of the students who participated in the Erasmus+ Program, it is understood that all of the students who participated in the program experienced different cultures and improved their foreign languages, which is in line with Adanır and Susam (2019). One of the biggest reasons the students express is to improve their language skills, which is in line with (Endes, 2015; Bağcı et al., 2018). Therefore, it can be said that students want to participate in the program significantly to improve in practical terms, in line with Bakioğlu and Certel (2010). It was found that most of the participants' primary motivation for studying abroad was to experience different learning contents /curricula, to learn or develop a foreign language, and to develop social skills such as adaptability, problem-solving, and curiosity parallel (Demir &Demir, 2009; De Wit, 2017). The study's findings unveiled that the Erasmus+ program offers students a highly qualified education, fosters personal growth positively, instills a sense of satisfaction in their involvement within a foreign country and culture and leads to a favorable experience of being in diverse international settings. These results are in line with (Göksu, 2011; Bağcı et al., 2018; Mede & Tüzün, 2016).

The study's findings indicate that the Erasmus+ program facilitated opportunities for students to gain exposure to diverse cultures (Teichler, 2004; Santos & Cunha, 2018) and engage with individuals from various backgrounds. The fact that all of the students in our study recognized different cultures and people as an outcome is included in many studies in the literature. Their studies (Altay, 2016; Kohn, 2015; Papatsiba, 2005; Urquía-Grande & Sancak, 2009; Ünal, 2016) found that the program provided students with the opportunity to encounter different cultures and that students were able to view events in different dimensions.

Furthermore, it was ascertained that this program augmented students' sense of accountability, enhanced their linguistic proficiency (Okur, 2016; Sarıtaş, 2011; Altay, 2016), shaped their prospective vocational aspirations, and afforded them a unique experiential opportunity. As previously indicated, students primarily emphasize the cultural aspect of the program. However, it can be observed that approximately half of the students also place importance on the academic dimension of the program. From this perspective, a significant proportion of the student population actively engaged in the program with the primary objectives of exploring diverse educational systems and visiting novel destinations, particularly within the European continent, which aligns with (Şahin, 2007).

It can be argued that students engaged in the program to foster interpersonal connections, conduct comparative analyses of educational systems, acquire knowledge about the European Union, enhance their professional competencies, explore possibilities for relocation to Europe, examine student-faculty dynamics, and explore prospects for postgraduate studies as in line with (Adanır & Susam, 2019). This study additionally discovered that most university students who participated in the Erasmus+ program encountered various challenges. The primary challenges encompass economic hardships (Kohn, 2015; Bağcı et al., 2018), linguistic barriers (Dinçer et al., 2017), climate conditions, cultural differences (Pavlina, 2021; Onağ et al., 2022; Göksel, 2022), and issues of food and nourishment. The findings indicate that the students who participated in the Erasmus+ program expressed overall satisfaction with the quality of instruction provided by the instructors at the universities in which they were involved. Furthermore, it was found that students had no difficulties with education, accommodation, transportation services, and internet connectivity in line with (Pavlina, 2021; Guan, 2021; Hanson et al., 2019).

The students listed additional information, observations, comments, or advice from the participating students that may be useful for students wishing to go abroad to participate in Erasmus+ student mobility and for sending and receiving higher education institutions. They recommended

that these higher institutions provide information about the local culture, traditions, lifestyle, and language in advance and support in dealing with possible difficulties they may encounter in the host country. In addition, it emphasized the need to provide academic support and counseling. Furthermore, it was indicated that the Erasmus+ students recommended that host universities organize events to encourage cultural interaction among students and offer programs to support language learning. Eventually, it was also emphasized that host universities should provide students with the necessary information on health care, insurance, and emergencies and take measures to keep them safe, encourage students to participate in social activities and integrate them into the local community. Based on the feedback from the students, they believe that both sending and receiving institutions should implement corrective actions in different areas. Hence, it is evident that the institutions capable of overseeing and governing the Erasmus+ program should consider these student recommendations.

One of the outcomes of this study is that the wages provided to students participating in the Erasmus+ program are insufficient to cover their overall expenses. However, the students were generally highly satisfied with the Erasmus+ program and expressed strong recommendations to their peers and the sending and hosting institutions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

The current study has a few limitations. The sample group is 26 students at Hakkari University. The small number of students in the current sample is a limitation. An example of different universities with many students may increase the credibility of the result so that the generalization of results can be more comprehensive. Therefore, more research on this subject should be investigated. The results of this study may be helpful for ESL students who have prejudices but do not have enough courage to go abroad and plan their future careers. It is recommended that policymakers and university educators demonstrate thoroughness and care by considering the results of

this study when facilitating student involvement in the Erasmus+ program. Additionally, they should ensure that students receive sufficient information before participating in the program.

As a result of the study, it was revealed that students had economic problems, problems of adaptation to different cultures, and difficulties with foreign languages. In this direction, it is suggested that universities should improve these skills by taking students to foreign language courses, organizing courses or activities to introduce different cultures, and taking necessary initiatives to improve the fees paid within the scope of the Erasmus+ program.

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