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**ERASMUS EFL EXCHANGE STUDENTS' BELIEFS
ABOUT THEIR LINGUISTIC AND ACADEMIC
COMPETENCES BEFORE AND AFTER MOBILITY**

Nazlı ALTINTAŞ

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ERASMUS İNGİLİZCE YABANCI DİL DEĞİŞİM
ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN HAREKETLİLİK ÖNCESİ VE SONRASI DİL
VE AKADEMİK YETERLİLİKLERİNE İLİŞKİN İNANÇLARI

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ÖZET

Uluslararasılaşma, küresel çağın bir gerekliliği olarak hayatın hemen hemen her alanında etkisini göstermektedir. Siyasetten ekonomiye, sağlıktan eğitime tüm alanlarda toplumlar birbirine yakınlaşmış ve kaçınılmaz olarak etkileşim meydana gelmiştir. Bu etkileşimde en önemli role ve kaynağa sahip olan yükseköğretim kurumları bu amaç doğrultusunda çalışmalar yapmaktadır. En bilinen ve en çok rağbet gören faaliyet ise öğrenci değişim programları olmuştur. Bu programlarda başı çeken Erasmus Programı ile ülkemizden ve tüm dünyadan öğrenciler bulundukları yerlerden farklı ülkelerde ve okullarda eğitim görerek kendilerini keşfetmekte ve geliştirmektedirler. Hiç şüphesiz bu süreç dil becerilerinin gelişmesinin yanı sıra öğrencileri akademik açıdan da zenginleştiren bir deneyim olmaktadır. Tüm dünyanın ortak dili olan İngilizce, bu emellerini gerçekleştirmeleri için sahip olmaları gereken başat anahtardır. Ülkemizde de gittikçe artan giden öğrenci sayısı öğrencilerimizin kendi kabuklarını kırıp yeni bir dünya keşfetmek ve kendilerini geliştirmek için ne kadar hevesli olduklarını gösteren bir kanıttır. Bu çalışmada öğrencilerin dilsel ve akademik açıdan gelişimlerine odaklanılmış ve alanda yapılan çalışmalar incelenmiştir. Ayrıca, değişim faaliyeti süresince öğrencilerin karşılaştıkları zorlukların neler olduğu ve bu zorlukların üstesinden gelebilmek için bulunan çözüm yolları çalışmada araştırılan bir diğer konudur.

213 yükseköğretim öğrencisinin desteği ile yapılan anket çalışması ile bu katılımcıların Erasmus kapsamında uygulanan zorunlu OLS test sonuçları kullanılarak veriler toplanmıştır. Elde edilen sonuçlar öğrencilerin Erasmus faaliyeti sonrasında okuma, dinleme, dil bilgisi ve kelime becerilerinin geliştiğini ve akademik anlamda daha yetkin hissettiklerini göstermektedir. Verilerin analizinde SPSS 25.0 programı kullanılmış ve normal dağılım göstermeyen sonuçlar için Wilcoxon Signed-Rank testi uygulanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Erasmus Programı, dil yeterliği, akademik yeterlik



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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEFR	: Common European Framework of Reference
COMETT	: The Community Action Program for Education and Training
EC	: European Commission
ECTS	: European Credit Transfer System
EFL	: English as a Foreign Language
EP	: European Parliament
Etc.	: Et Cetera
EU	: European Union
F	: Frequency
HEI	: Higher Education Institution
IoHE	: Internationalization of Higher Education
IM	: Intensive Domestic Immersion
IOM	: International Organization for Migration
LLP	: Lifelong Learning Program
NNSs	: Non-native Speakers
OECD	: The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OLS	: Online Linguistic Support System
SA	: Study Abroad
SMS	: Student Mobility for Study
SPSS	: Statistical Package for Social Sciences
NA	: National Agency
UNESCO	: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WTC	: Willing to Communicate
KMO Test	: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy test

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

This chapter is composed of background, purpose, significance and limitations of the study and definitions of some terms employed in the study.

1.1. Background of the Study

The use of the term "internationalization" in politics, economics and other issues concerning governmental affairs dates back to centuries ago. Additionally, internationalization in education also appears as a historical phenomenon. Internationalization in education started to gain its present conceptual character after the World War II (WWII) and began to take place in strategic plans in higher education institutions in the 1980s. Accordingly, it can be said that education was no longer the monopoly of the old powerful authorities and entered into the domination of states and institutions that aspired to become visible and had a voice in the international arena. Governments have provided necessary support and invested in these institutions for this target since then. Therefore, higher education institutions (HEIs), which play a leading role in the process of providing and raising human resources have become the main figures of internationalization. Various international social activities conducted at the beginning have become inadequate over time and universities have expanded abroad by implementing different plans aiming to train professionals that the global world needs in line with today's requirements.

Since the early 1970s, the rapidly increasing number of tertiary level students and parallel to this, the increasing number of international students have contributed to the acculturation process and have made closed societies innovative and tolerant towards new ideas and differences. Students who do not have the opportunity to become a long-term international student have benefitted from short-term mobility programs. The most preferred of these exchange programs is the Erasmus+ student mobility for study (SMS) and for placement conducted by European Union (EU). Turkey has made sound contributions to this flagship program with high number of outbound participants

incidental to its high number of tertiary education students. Statistical analyses demonstrate that majority of these outgoing students spare their term(s) in non-anglophone countries where English is used as a second language (European Commission [EC], 2018b). Due to being the predominant language of communication, English is the most commonly learned and taught language among people. Therefore, English is the most preferred language to be studied by participants even in Online Linguistic Support (OLS) provided by EU for language support.

Due to providing natural environment full of with native speakers and other international peers, study abroad (SA) is assumed to be one of the most efficient ways to develop language skills. Although, improving the foreign language proficiency level is one of the top common motivations, the aims, needs, interests and expectations of the participants diversify. These intentions of the students are analyzed and supported by many studies which reveal the progress in overall language competences either one, or even three levels higher (Coleman, 1998; Hessel, 2016; Cojocaru, 2018).

Another most stated motivation is improving the academic skills (Nyaupane, Paris, & Teye, 2010). A study conducted by Hadis (2005) proves that SA enhances participants' open-mindedness and decision-making independence which effect academic focusing positively. Thanks to acquiring new skills and learning new concepts and methods that haven't been met before enable students to learn scientific research processes and to develop their academic competence in addition to progress in overall English language proficiency (Mızıkacı & Arslan, 2019).

1.2. Purpose of the Study

In this study, it is anticipated to find the significant effect of Erasmus program on development of academic and linguistic competences of the participants. The study aims to explore the impact of SA context on exchange students' progress on reading, listening, grammar and vocabulary proficiencies of English as a foreign language and the relationship between initial and final proficiency levels in respect of overall competency. Furthermore, the beliefs of the students about the academic competence before, during

and after Erasmus program, the challenges encountered and the suggestions against these challenges are other investigated objectives.

1.3. Significance of the Study

Until now, many studies have been conducted regarding the contributions of Erasmus+ student mobility to the variable competences of the students. However, the number of studies investigating the impacts on linguistic and academic competences of the program is not as sufficient as other competences researched.

In this respect, examining the progress in linguistic competence of the students by comparing before and after OLS evaluation results and the relationship between these two outcomes as well as investigating students' general beliefs about their academic competences is expected to fill the lack in the literature. Moreover, scrutiny of experiences of the students related to challenges they met and how they tried to solve the problems will be beneficial to the future Erasmus students to be cautious before leaving.

1.4. Limitations of the Study

There are some limitations of the study to be taken into consideration while evaluating the findings. One of them is the COVID-19 pandemic that has caused schools shut in the whole world which has ended up face-to face education. Due to teaching remotely and online, participants including in this study have been reached through e-mails. Through the instrument of International Relations Office of various universities, students have been informed about the questionnaire. Although being connected hundreds of students, the number of students who participated in the questionnaire is limited to 213 students, it could have been much more yet. To this respect, the study banks on self-reports of these participants and their perceptions about their academic competences rather than substitutive documents.

Other limitations that shouldn't be ignored while interpreting the findings are inherent in the OLS platform. Although it is a highly comprehensive and reliable platform testing students' language proficiency levels, we cannot be sure how seriously the

examinations are conducted by students. Moreover, productive skills which are the most affected and advanced skills during abroad (Hernandez, 2010; Bogain, 2012; Jacobone & Moro, 2014) are ignored in OLS evaluation part. Therefore, whether speaking and writing competences of the participants progress or not is not examined in this study.

Last but not least, the results were not obtained through making a comparison between SA and at home (AH) context students. In fact, more reliable findings could be obtained if AH and SA contexts were being able to compared.

1.5. Definitions of Terms

Erasmus: Erasmus is an EU program concerning tertiary level students' and academics' exchange mobility in a partner or program country. It takes place for 3- 12 months at each cycle for students and 2 days-2 months for academic staff. During the mobility participants are granted and they do not have to pay any tuition fee.

CEFR: It is an international standard consisting 6 levels that defines language ability.

Online Linguistic Support: It is a free online language learning and language assessment platform designed for Erasmus+. It provides optional language courses and compulsory tests language levels before and after mobility.

Linguistic Competence: It is defined as the native speakers' ability to formulate "well-formed sentences" (Thornbury, 2006, p.37).

Academic Competence: It entails all the skills, behaviors and attitudes related to academic success rather than just traditional meaning referring to the ability in subjects such as math, science et.

Study Abroad Context: It refers to the educational programs in abroad to develop foreign language competence.

At Home Context: It refers to the formal classroom in students' home country to learn a foreign language.

Intensive Immersion: It refers to foreign language learning by fully and only being exposed to it in L1 environment.



CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Internationalization

Internationalization is a term which has different and a plethora of meanings for different contexts. Actually, it is a term which has been used for centuries, especially in the fields of political science, governmental issues and economy. As a starting point, this concept can be defined basically as “the process of increasing involvement in international operations” (Welch & Luostarinen, 1988, p. 36). By virtue of the incessantly changing and shrinking world, the borders among nations have turned into lines just on the maps. The term borderless that is used to describe this circumstance emerged firstly in 2000 in Australian and the UK reports referring as mentioned above to nebulize the concept geographical, conceptual borders among nations especially in the field of education (Knight, 2015). Hereby, any news in a country can be learned immediately from another country which is miles away by means of technology and internet and can be customized by nations in accordance with their own settings. Nowadays it is a must to follow and implement the new and adapt to technology in order to keep up with the developments and not to fall behind the time. Therefore, increasing opportunities and easy access to innovations through internet oversteps the boundaries of nations and makes internationalization ineluctable (Hollsten, 2016). From this point of view, internationalization cannot be thought separately from globalization since there is a dynamic relationship between these two, in fact, sometimes they may focus on the same dynamics.

At this juncture, to as it is beriefly defined globalization is the articulation of national economies with global markets and increasingly determining all economic decision processes with the dynamics of world capitalism towards capital accumulation (Yeldan, 2013). As mentioned above, these two concepts, of which economic and political needs are the root causes, have sparked off such a significant change that there is no country, nation, culture or individual to be affected. This is as-is and to-be; therefore, people are

affected from this evolvement so profoundly that the distances become closer and reaching someone, somewhere, or something has become pretty rapid and easy (Hannerz & Löfgren, 1994). When considered from this view, the phrase *global village* coined by Marshall McLuhan corresponds to today's world to the full. In this sense, globalization can be defined as being focused on unification in a diversity of interdependent economies. With this international liberalization of trade and markets is seen as the most substantial move in this respect (Luijten-Lub, Huisman & van der Wende, 2005).

As it is understood, these two terms have come into our lives in consequence of economic and political needs, and have had their impact in all other areas over time. There are hardly any internal disciplines unaffected by internationalization. In this study, educational effects, primarily actions and reactions in tertiary level education are the central focuses.

2.1.1. Internationalization of Higher Education

Universities are significant elements of society and are in the center of the 21st century's knowledge-based economy. In addition to training for talented and qualified individuals required by age, universities, where necessary studies are carried out, are the source of innovative research and studies. Keeping up with age by following the emerging events undoubtedly requires internationalization by virtue of globalization. Within this context, in line with the mentioned distinction, globalization and internationalization differ from each other in the following sense. While one refers to what happens to higher education institutions (HEIs), the other means the activities carried out in this direction. In brief; while globalization refers to all the economic, political and social exposures that push higher education, internationalization refers to the impressive performance of cross-border interactions committed by HEIs in reaction to this force. It means that the first one refers to the state of being and the latter refers to the process (Cantwell & Maldonado-Maldonado, 2009). In fact, the concept that dates back to ancient times has become increasingly important in higher education, especially in forty years period. Hence, there are many definitions of the term. Different authors make different definitions stemming

from different necessities and purposes. For example, Söderqvist (2007) defines internationalization of higher education (IoHE) as;

a change process from a national HEI to an international HEI leading to the inclusion of an international dimension in all aspects of its holistic management in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning and to achieve the desired competences (p.29).

Not only that, van der Wende (1997) explains it as “any systematic effort aimed at making higher education responsive to the requirements and challenges related to the globalization of societies, economy and labor markets” (p.19). “The multiple activities, programs and services that fall within international studies, international educational exchange and technical cooperation” is another definition by Arum and van de Water (1992, p. 214) which intensifies the implementation of globalization.

Unfortunately, de Wit (2002) finds all these definitions inadequate because to him they have been created for the current needs and lacked an overall coverage; therefore, a more inclusive description is needed to be done for IoHE. Knight (2007, p. 214) who also agrees that the evolving term still lacks a sufficient definition covering all respects makes another definition believing that it would consist a broader and more neutral expression than previous ones, which would be more preferable for everyone and every purpose. The proposed definition is “it is the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education”.

As far as Işık (2014) remarks, seeing higher education as an exportable product, internationalization in higher education has developed in two axes: the first one is creating similar curriculum with international universities in order to meet the changing needs and the second one is the ever-increasing cross-border activities. Moreover, Smelser (2003) who believes being international refers to the relations among nations gives additional ideas for internationalization such as abroad programs, international organizations, associations dedicated to achieving international cooperation, building networks across international lines.

Teacher training programs abroad, establishing international connections and opening up branch campuses are other regulations. After all, short-term mobility programs have the most significant impact in contrast with other steps due to being the most preferred option with high numbers of participants.

2.1.2. History of Internationalization of Higher Education

Notwithstanding that the term internationalization has been used chiefly in political and governmental relations for centuries, its use in higher education dates back to middle ages. As a beginning, the terms such as international education or international cooperation were being used, and later transnational education, borderless education, offshore education superseded. Following that, internationalization comes into the agenda in the field of education (Knight, 2007). The main reasons of this forming of the IoHEs can be classified as understanding foreign languages and cultures, having international quality in education and research, foreign policy elements, and economic growth (Olcay & Nasir, 2016).

The original universities which firstly appeared in Bologna and Paris were ground on that international philosophy because of studying with the international students and professors and realizing international knowledge-based education system (Altbach & Teichler, 2001). It supports the idea that universities have always been international and based on universal knowledge and concept by its nature (de Wit, 2018; Altbach, 1998). By the same token, Kerr (1994) states that as well as having national ground reasoned by a common religion, language and place, universities are intrinsically international (as cited in de Wit, 2018). Thenceforward, the concept has evolved continuously and even different definitions have been made for the same situation.

Higher education institutions began to become far-flung in a short time throughout Europe subsequently after the first founded ones and the common official language became Latin, the lingua franca of that century (Altbach & Teichler, 2001). Both students and academics were not only locals but also from other countries that helped to construct interculturality and unity in diversity (de Wit, 2002; de Wit, 2018). In order to follow and

be aware of innovations occurred in other sides of the world, more importance was begun to be given to the translation science (Alwazna, 2013). Despite overwhelming odds against the influence of Protestant Reformation that caused conservatism, dominance of industrialized countries and rising nationalism, universities preserved their international quality especially in science (Altbach & Teichler, 2001). Being just one part of the ongoing process of change and development, the evolution of universities has gained momentum and exchanges have become integral part of the society. However, the term internationalization process in higher education officially appeared firstly in an article almost fifty years ago by Buchbinder (Cantwell & Maldonado- Maldonado, 2009). Since that time, many academic journals and books have been published with full of new research and topics about globalization and IoHEIs.

More publications and ever-mounting mobility of students especially in the 20th century are the rewards of the efforts that institutions put in as documented by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2019) statistics. By extrapolating data sustained by UNESCO, Börjesson (2017) declares that while 1.6 million students were mobile in the world between 1993 and 1995, this number increased to more than 5.3 million in 2017. Meanwhile, the USA, the UK, Australia, France, Germany and the Russian Federation became the core destinations of these students (OECD, 2020). According to the documentation of Study in Turkey (2020), in 2001 the number of international students studying in Turkey were 16,656 and the number climbed to 185,047 in 2020. Nevertheless, these numbers expose the population of international students and in order to learn the number of Erasmus participants, the official data shared by EC needs to be controlled. Erasmus program which was inaugurated in 1987 with 3200 tertiary level students (EC, 2020c), has went from strength to strength by attaining 10 million students for over three decades (EC, 2020d). The 11 countries that were visited during launch were Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, France, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom (EC, 2020c). But now, students can reach to the whole world by Erasmus program.

Before that the first implementations of internationalization strategies in Europe began in only 1980s because of being have to recover from the devastation of WWII which caused a stability in both governance structures and institutional organization. Therefore, Europe had to concentrate on reconstruction and had to follow more national education policies at first (de Wit, 2018). The situation changed by elite degree-seeking students who travelled for education thereby governments had to sign new international agreements which at first were for small groups but later for extended groups. Following that, with Fulbright, Joint Study Degree Programs and Erasmus, the number of these students have proliferated (de Wit & Adams, 2010).

The two main prime movers behind these efforts are to increase the number of international students for infusing the idea of Europeanization and to have a strong place in the global economy (Altbach & Knight, 2007; de Wit & Adams, 2010; Jacobone & Moro, 2014; Mitchell, 2012; Sigalas, 2010). In sober fact, as Oborune (2013) points out there has always been a continuous cycle between these two processes, that is, economic integration has an impact on building a strong Europeanisation identity and vice versa. Hence, many other European countries led by the UK, changed their policy and adapted new regulations for international tertiary level students. For example, a transition from scholarship-based education to low tuition fees or full-cost fees for international students emerged which caused an increasing competitiveness in global knowledge-based economy in the world. The understanding of cooperative education which is based on diversity of languages and cultures have turned into a more competitive cognizance due to these initiatives and gradual but increasing alteration (de Wit, 2018).

2.1.3. Significance of Internationalization of Higher Education

Nowadays, internationalization has become a trend and an essential element in HEIs. As the number of local students enrolled in universities increases, the number of international students increases accordingly (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2013). Exact figures are kept by OECD and the numerical increase between 1975 and 2016 can be seen clearly in the figure below.

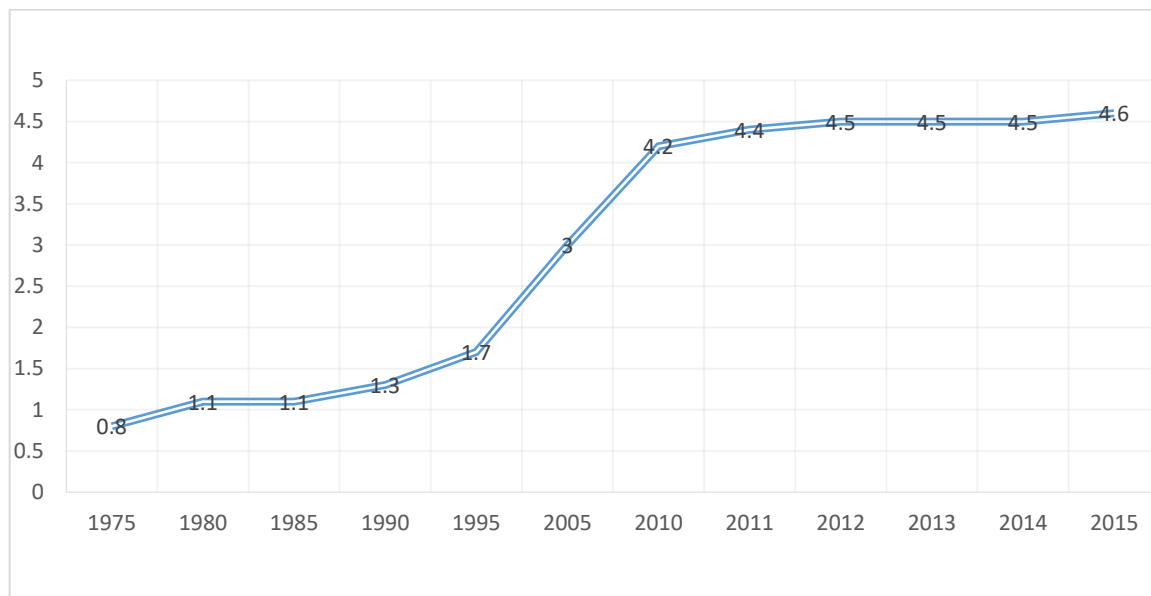


Figure 1: The growth in Foreign Student Enrollment in Tertiary Education between 1975- 2015 (OECD, 2017).

As observed in the Figure 1, the number of international students increased from 0.8 million in 1970 to 4.6 million in 2015. It should be noted that significant growth has arisen between 1995 and 2010. It is also the evidence of how HEIs have achieved their internationalization goals and how students have tried to keep up with the globalized world by managing to get out of their shells and discovering new horizons. Cultural, economic and technological developments and cooperative ventures at national and international levels have made international mobility more preferable and affordable by means of financial support, priority in visa applications, discounts on flight tickets for Erasmus students etc. Moreover, the understanding of knowledge and innovation-based economy grows the value of tertiary level education, which causes this considerable increase in the number of international students inasmuch as invaluable local variables required by our age.

New events and developments in the world effect the universities' international strategies and structures. Since the investigations about social and technological innovations contribute to the development of human welfare, renewing information with joint initiatives between other HEIs in different countries, constructing a more pluralistic

dialogue environment and increasing intercultural and academic dialogue become critical implementations (Çetinsaya, 2014). In return, students, teaching staff and other social groups who are part of these institutions get affected; therefore, effective and efficient plans should be applied in order to increase the number of mobile students.

HEIs which have a significant impact on acculturation are the places where all kinds of opinions are expressed freely, developments around the world are followed instantly, and individuals from different cultures come together. They contribute to all kinds of cultural enrichment by helping the local people to get used to innovations and differences in breaking the introverted structure of the society. Institutions that follow a severe and practical roadmap towards internationalization play a key role in increasing tolerance and dialogue in society and supporting the global peace and prosperity in the long run (Çetinsaya, 2014).

Moreover, it is fairly obvious that increasing the number of tertiary level students who are proficient in foreign languages is another fundamental objective of HEIs in order to conduct any research and study by improving international tolerance, preferability and competitiveness (Rumbley, Altbach & Reisberg, 2012). Therewithal as expressed by Kalvemark and van der Wende (1997) in order to staff required personnel and enable preparation for the increasing demand in the labor market as a consequence of globalization, HEIs need to develop themselves academically, professionally and also internationally by providing a social, intercultural and multilingual environment. All in all, incorporating credit and degree mobilities and academic exchanges, constructing partnerships, signing international project-based cooperation, adding internationalization into the curriculums and researches, building branch campuses or agencies, providing face-to-face or distance education in different countries, governments' giving assistance to international development are the provisions of HEIs as a service for internationalization (Yakupoglu, 2014).

To sum up, while planning their curriculum and forming the annual strategical planning, HEIs are expected to do necessary planning in respect of the rising competition

in the world by producing original ways that brings an added value without copying-and-pasting ready-made models.

2.1.4. How Internationalization Appears in Turkey

As well as short-term and long-term international mobility programs, providing scholarship for second and third cycle students, harmonizing education systems according to Bologna Process, establishing new partnerships abroad, opening branch schools are the most prevalent steps attempted during internationalization process in Turkey. In addition to the successful implementation of Erasmus program, by putting Mevlana Exchange program into force in 2014, it is possible to observe how seriously this process is taken. The authoritative institution of the Mevlana program, Council of Higher Education in Turkey sustains non-refundable financial support for every incoming and outgoing participant (YÖK, 2020). By providing comparable diplomas and grades internationally, these two programs for higher education students and staff are regulated successfully in accordance with the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Another attempt is the removal of the central and compulsory YÖS exam in 2010 and enabling the universities to be flexible while accepting international students via their own exams and evaluations (Aslan, 2015). The project, Study in Turkey, has been developed to attract international students also provides direct communication opportunity to these students about the education system, admission and exchange conditions of universities, financial issues and life conditions in Turkey (Şimşek, & Bakır, 2016).

Turkey has taken its significant place among major countries by attracting students from abroad thanks to these ventures. The number of international students has been increasing year by year; for example, in 1983, while there were 5.378 international students, in 2014 this number reached to 55.000 (Çetinsaya, 2014). By the end of 2015, the number had heightened to 125.138 with the participation of students mostly from Syria, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Iran and Afghanistan (YÖK, 2019). The number of students from North America and Western Europe, East Asia and Pacific countries is also quite high (YÖK, 2019; Olcay & Nasır, 2016). The top five cities preferred by

incoming international students are İstanbul, Ankara, Eskişehir, Bursa and Konya (YÖK, 2019). The numebr of incoming students between 2001 and 2018 is demonstrated in detail below.

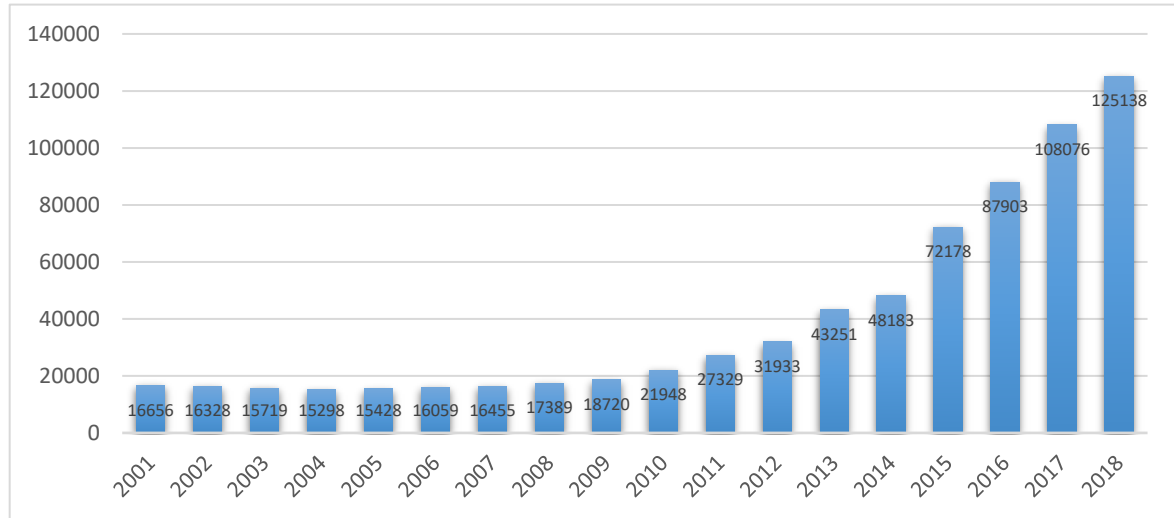


Figure 2: Total number of incoming international students in Turkey (YÖK, 2019)

In consonance with the Figure 2 a steady increase is conferred especially after 2009. Notwithstanding these climbing numbers, the share of the whole is not satisfactory. The general average of international students in Turkey remains under the average with 1.9% whereas, it is 8% in other OECD countries (OECD, 2020). It points out the necessity of extra attempts on the road for internationalization.

Similar to this increase in the number of long-term students, the number of short-term students within the scope of Erasmus program has increased over years. The growing number of incoming and outgoing students is presented in the table below.

Table 2.1 The number of Erasmus incoming and outgoing students (2004-2018)

Academic Year	Outgoing Students	Incoming Students	Total
2004	1142	299	1441
2005	2852	828	3680
2006	4438	1321	5759

2007	7119	1982	9101
2008	7794	2658	10452
2009	8758	3356	12094
2010	10095	4288	14383
2011	11826	5651	17477
2012	14412	6145	20557
2013	15084	7403	22487
2014	14710	7948	22658
2015	16215	7438	23653
2016	15827	3379	19206
2017	17902	2785	20687
Grand Total	149223	55667	204890

(YÖK, 2019, p. 20)

As Table 2.1 evinces, although the augmentation of both outgoing and incoming students is steady, the decrease in the number of outgoing students in 2014 draws attention. This situation can result from procedural arrangements of the process of transition from LLP program to Erasmus+, and the decrease in the number of incoming students in 2015 and 2016 can be interpreted with unfortunate terrorist attacks during that time. Moreover, it is evident that there is an imbalance between the number of incoming and outgoing students which is possibly based on the high population of Turkey. Besides these, outgoing students prefer to study mostly in Germany, France, Poland, Holland and Italy. The students that are welcomed by Turkish higher education institutions are mainly from Poland, Germany, Italy, Spain and France (YÖK, 2017). Presumably, family bonds are the reason why the exchanges are more frequent within these countries.

2.1.5. Future of Internationalization of Higher Education

It is not possible to ignore the processes of globalization and internationalization; however, it is difficult to predict what kind of process awaits higher education in the future. Nevertheless, it would be indispensable not to comment on the future of higher education because of changing global trends in the educational area (Wildavsky, 2010).

The future of the nations is related to how they can adapt themselves on global knowledge economy. Universities that are responsible for academic developments, training the workforce and delivering new information to the society are the most crucial parts of this work. Additively to the global teams and intensified international cooperation, it is possible to say that through developing technology and the internet, higher education will turn into centers where both competition and cooperation prevail, where not only people but also knowledge move more intensively and rapidly in the future (Green, Marmolejo & Egron-Polak, 2012). The changing and developing world is becoming so independent that students should be trained ready for this situation. It is apparent that mobility programs especially Erasmus plays a significant role in the internationalization process of the HEIs not only in Europe and Turkey but also for the rest of the world. In establishment of a shared understanding and in the process of creating practical conveniences, the Bologna Process plays a fundamental role.

An in-depth study conducted by OECD (2009) has extrapolated the future of internationalization of HEIs. Regarding this research it is foreseen that students and academic staff will contact with the other HEIs in abroad more than before, international researches will gain more importance and cross border mobilities will be an inseparable part of universities. Unlike these optimistic views, it has been also revealed the basic issues that higher education will encounter in the coming 30 years, it is emphasized that higher education area will not be globalized entirely in institutional terms and some institutions may effort to stick on their national roots, yet it will be inevitable to be captivated by the internationalization trend (OECD, 2009; Green et al., 2012). Despite internationalization may adversely affect increasing death rates, wars and pandemics, economic crises, political and religious tensions and migration, it is also inevitable in order to overcome these problems (de Wit & Hunter, 2015). Therefore, developing technology, escalating population and number of students will have both positive and negative consequences according to researchers. One of the chain reactions is seen in the increasing number of populations over the world. This growing population bumps up the number of international students in HEIs, bilateral agreements, incoming and outgoing students, the

workload of international offices and will create changes in curriculum and cause highly likely brain drain as a necessary condition (Firoz, 2016).

2.2. European Union

Before the EU was officially established, it was just a dream of some philosophers adorned by this idea (Rifkin, 2004). Unfortunately, this dream came to naught by terrible bloody wars and international hatred which have lasted for many years. As a result, societies were adversely affected not only financially but also emotionally. However, a glimmer of hope appeared among the ruins of the WWII, and the first steps were taken to make the dreams come true and the phantasy verge into a real political project based on peaceful and humanist understanding (Swedberg, 1994).

Led by six countries; Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, European countries united economically and politically, and the European Coal and Steel Community was established in 1951 with the leadership of Jean Monnet, and Robert Schuman who were the pioneers to take the first serious steps arguing that peace should be prevailed and countries should serve for the same economic and political purposes (Marks, 1999). The community were expanded by the attendance of new member states and developed its standard policies through time. With the Maastricht Treaty, the EU was established in 1993; afterwards, adopting the Lisbon Strategy encouraging innovations were involved in economy and education system to meet the needs of continually evolving society (Fontaine, 2006). Began to the journey with six participant states, the number of member states has increased to 28; Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Republic of Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden, Croatia. However, lastly decreased back to 27 with the Brexit on January 31, 2020 (EU, 2020).

The association between Turkey and the EU has a long history. The partnership which started with the Ankara Agreement in 1963 continued with the Additional Protocol that regulated the transition period of the partnership in the 1970s and reached an advanced

level with the establishment of the Customs Union between the parties in 1996. In 1999 Helsinki Summit, the candidacy of Turkey was accepted as irreversibly, and the negotiations for membership began officially in 2004 (Öniş, 2000).

The main aims of forming EU are constructing a peaceful, prosperous and united Europe by giving an end to the relentless and everlasting wars by removing borders. To create a free, safe and fair environment, to combat social differences, to support scientific and technological development, to create a multilingual environment and to establish a common economic unity and to create a single currency are the other key objectives of the EU (EU, 2020). The mission of Europe in 21st century can be summarized as;

- to sustain prosperity and stability
- to provide safety for citizens
- to prevent economic and social imbalance
- to sustain unity in diversity by considering concepts such as multinationalism and multilingualism
- to uphold the idea of Europeanisation
- to ensure human rights and equality (Fontaine, 2006).

Compliance of education to the standards and norms of EU has extra importance in EU's policy due to the significant role of education in enlargement and sustainability of EU. Attitudes of the individuals are effective to run projects successfully and education is the most significant variable to enable this insight (Toprakçı, 2004). Hence, both member states and candidates are focused on the dimension of education to improve the life standards of its citizens.

2.2.1. Education Policies of European Union

Until the 1970s, educational policies were not included directly in the program of the European Community due to insufficient experience and equipment. As a result, let alone focusing in the field of education, producing projects were also not possible (Çakır, 2010; Pepin, 2007). Therefore education of the migrants' children, vocational education

and training and economic development were the first urgent issues that occupied the agenda (Corbett, 2005; John & Murphy, 2019; Maassen & Musselin, 2009; Walkenhorst, 2008).

Albeit free movement of people forced the government to take action programs even belatedly (Çakır, 2010) such as, Socrates, Leonardo Da Vinci and Youth for Europe. As the existing programs were considered as insufficient in meeting the targets, Jean Monnet program started to be implemented in 1989. Furthermore, in 2014 all programs were gathered under the umbrella program named Erasmus+ for ease of implementation. The reason why all programs are gathered under the title of Erasmus+ is welds from its being the most popular activity.

Passing through a knowledge-based society and under Maastricht Treaty extra steps had to be taken, activities in higher education were cautiously acknowledged, and the concept of Lifelong Learning came into life through which educational policies became the current issue of the Community especially after Lisbon Council amid the 2000s (John & Murphy, 2019). Following the adaptation of Lisbon Strategy and Bologna Process, Erasmus Higher Education Area (EHEA) was founded and the EU became more effective in tertiary level of education and its visibility and importance for universities increased in the world (Keiling, 2006).

Creating a European identity has been the main factor that determines the EU's education policies. To construct a sense of belonging to a united Europe and maintain the existence of the Union, the importance of education has been discovered and the attention of governments, politicians and other policymakers has been taken into the four vital themes; "teaching teachers; exchanges; creating institutions; and vocational training" (John, 2019, p. 28).

Being aware of the importance of education for the future of the EU does not mean changing the educational policies of the members one by one. EU, which is neither a state nor an international union, envisages a cooperative approach to educational policy despite imposing mandatory regulations in many fields as a supranational union. The reason for

this is the idea that it will not be easy to gather all the educational policies of nations under one policy, which is against the establishment purpose of EU (Gültekin & Anagün, 2006; Sağlam, Özüdoğru & Çıray, 2011). In other words, although every country is free to apply a system appropriate to its socio-economic structure, they have to comply with some basic social criteria (Çakır, 2010) such as generalizing vocational education and forming a common policy, regulating vertical model instead of horizontal model in education, enabling students to learn two foreign languages before graduating from high school and sustaining employability (EC, 2018d). By reason of the basic principle of EU is not to eliminate the differences but to evaluate them as an opportunity to boost education system by harmonizing these differences and getting a unity in diversity.

Turning these differences into an opportunity and seeing it as a wellness, encouraging national, regional and local educators to work together and increasing cooperation are some educational objectives (Sağlam et al., 2011). However, the most conclusive aim of the EU is to ensure an education system which meets the needs of the society by striving to provide the best educational opportunities for its citizens. Making students, teachers and all the other young and adult people to benefit from exchange programs and consequently to propagate multilingualism serve for the ultimate aim of EU. In addition to all these objectives, Roy (2002) has added a few more features such as encouraging mutual recognition of diplomas and exchange processes in order to support student and academic staff mobilities, developing cooperation between educational institutions, dissemination of open and distance education; constructing partnerships with international educational institutions; adapting technology in education and improving continuing and vocational education, preparing and facilitating the adaptation of young people to social and professional life; increasing employment around Europe and lastly developing cooperation between educational institutions and other relevant organizations abroad.

The main philosophy behind these objectives of EU is to be innovative, creative, equal, entrepreneurial and to support lifelong learning. Grounded on this philosophy, in

order to reach these goals, raise interculturally competent people, EU organizes mobility programs for all citizens from children to adults and supports these participants financially. Consequently, the education policy of EU is a structure which encompasses all the member states with a very generally drawn framework regarding Bologna Process and frees them to organize their own education system according to their economic, social and cultural characteristics rather than imposing EU's detailed policies.

2.2.2. Bologna Process

Along with Bologna Process, some new terms have come into our lives and become permanent such as three-cycle degree structure, European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), Diploma Supplement etc. These regulations make the qualifications of European universities more comparable.

A standard two-degree cycle structure declared in Sorbonne has changed into three-cycle degree structure at Berlin Communiqué in 2003 and evolved till 2012 Bucharest Communiqué. Under favor of this legislative arrangement, bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees have been used in EU program countries and have become a European standard. ECTS enables the credits to be accumulated and transferred between institutions for mobile students undertaken abroad. In Prague Communiqué, Diploma Supplement was put into the agenda which has been designed to support recognition of academic qualifications by reinforcing the principle of transparency (EC, 2015b).

Marched forward in time guidelines based on a detailed explanation of subjects have been designed and used in Europe, which enables to define skills by difficulty and fulfilment status. The explanations of the outcomes can be found in all national context. The first implementations were made through students studying in different institutions through the Erasmus program and have currently become a European standard which guides HEIs in general (Keeling, 2006).

The reforms in the Bologna Declaration which were signed by the ministers of 29 European countries were affected other 19 countries, and so the number of signatory

countries has risen to 48 (EC, 2018d). Since the signatory countries are mostly from EU, the decision mechanism may be considered as the EU, but there is no agreement, and a legal binding among these participating countries and they are free to choose whether or not to implement the decisions taken (YÖK, 2007). The primary purpose of the Bologna Process is to create a Higher Education Area together with enabling higher education students and staff to move around Europe for study and placement and increase the preferability in terms of employment.

In 2001, after taking part in Prague Communiqué, Turkey decided to implement the principles in a short time. For instance, in January 2002, Turkish Agency which is bound to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Directorate of the EU Affairs Center for EU Education and Youth Programs was founded. Higher Education Institution and universities have established EU offices, EU Programs Offices and International Relations Centers. Along with established commissions, international strategies have been taken, and meetings have been held in universities and other higher education institutions to provide consultancy and necessary documents to people (Korkut & Mızıkacı, 2008).

2.2.3. History of EU Education and Youth Programs

EU started to focus on the field of education in order to realize its objectives and strengthen its position. Since 1986 many education and training programs have been proposed and implemented for this purpose. These programs have changed over time and have been developed to meet economic and socio-cultural expectations, such as ensuring the necessary qualified human resources and strengthening the idea of Europeanisation. Even though the first implementations were based on vocational training, education policies on higher education were begun to be focused in 1986 because HEIs played a vital role to foster the relationship and cooperation. The first phase of the programs is seen between 1985 and 1990, which shows how the EU demanded to accelerate its action in specific areas of cooperation and later the programs were either changed or developed.

2.2.4. Launching the EU Education Programs

Comett (The Community Action Program for Education and Training in Technology) was the first EU education program emerged in 1980s and was applied in two phases through which EU aimed to perpetuate the competitive capacity of European industry by reinforcing training and human resources (Thompson & Ambler, 1990).

Erasmus which emerged after heated discussions which lasted for 18 months due to budget and legal reasons, was formally adopted only after a few meetings on June 15, 1987, as university cooperation and student mobility (EC, 2006a). The main objectives of the program were sustaining cooperation between universities, financial support for the mobilities and academic recognition of the qualifications gained by students in another university in a different country. Achieving these goals became so quick and successful that universities and students could not ignore the fame of the program (EC, 2006a).

Students could participate in the program from their second year for three to twelve months at a university in another European country once in tertiary education. Granting students and providing academic recognition led to increase the reliability to the program and the number of participants gained momentum steadily despite the scarcity of financial support.

During that period instead of global mobility, regional mobility was supported; maximum mobility period was declared as one year; ‘free movers’ were not supported financially most of the time; to be granted academic recognition was important; both students and sending institutions were granted moderately, and curricular integration was encouraged (Lanzendorf & Teichler, 2002). Although it was a successful program since the first day of its appearance, it also had some deficiencies such as insufficient grants and a lot of bureaucratic procedures. In this respect, in the new period, a revision was made in the program by taking these shortcomings into account.

The program was renewed between the years 1990-1994. Before it was embedded in Socrates between 1995 and 1999, the period of availability was not discussed. The high

demand and trust in the program increased its success, and Erasmus has become the flagship program and a symbol of the EU (EC, 2006a).

Petra sustaining vocational training and placement opportunities was a successful program that helped the government to deal with unemployment. The first phase of it lasted until 1992, and after being extended in 1994, it was included in the Leonardo Da Vinci Program (Rees, 1988).

Lingua was launched to improve the proficiency and knowledge of foreign languages of the EU citizens and sustained communication in the Community. To enable participants to understand the languages of the countries visited and to protect the cultural values of Europe, advocating respect for multilingualism were the critical elements of the construction of the Unity. Although the mother tongues of all member states were included in the education program, the least spoken languages were also given priority so that cultural and linguistic diversity should not disappear (Hermans, 1997).

Force and Eurotecnet was adapted in order to prevent long term unemployment and provide assistance for young people in workplace (Guerra, 1993). Rapid development in technology has led to the renewal of skills and knowledge, which has increased the importance of continuing education.

Tempus was the last of the projects implemented until the end of the 1980s in order to improve training and human resources. In the first phase (1990-1993), reforms were carried out in central and European countries and over time the scope has expanded upon the needs of other countries (Rees, 1988).

Youth Programs of which providing vocational education for young workers was the fundamental purpose also allowed young European people to meet with each other, develop cultural, social, transnational projects and build a sense of Europeanness (EC, 2006a).

2.2.4.1. Three Umbrella Programs

Since most of the programs ended in 1994, they had to be overhauled, updated and adjusted. Existing programs embodied higher education and vocational training; however, with the Maastricht agreement, an innovation was made, and another education program was included in the EU education programs; school education which covers the period between primary and secondary school. The renewal of programs and the inclusion of new ones compelled to make an arrangement. In consequence of the negotiations in the EC, the programs were gathered under three umbrella programs. Initial education and vocational training were gathered under Leonardo Da Vinci, the programs related to school education and higher education were gathered under Socrates and Youth programs covered the activities organized for all young people, so the third phase began (Lasonen, 2009). This route has been followed to reduce bureaucratic workload and to enable institutions to produce more comprehensive and planned projects without being overwhelmed by details. Since 1995, these programs served as a continuation of the previous ones with the extension of their duration.

2.2.4.1.1. Socrates

Socrates was an umbrella program sustaining democracy, tolerance and a common European identity for young and adult participants. The first span of the program covered the period between 1995 and 1999. The second span covered the years between 2000 and 2006 and Turkey participated in the program in 2004. In addition to the previous programs regulated for higher education and school education, new programs were adopted and sited under Socrates (European Parliament [EP], 1995). Within this context, Socrates covered all types of learning from nursery to adult education which featured it both informal and formal and addressed to learners, teachers, trainers, workers and management staff.

In this period, international agreements and partnerships, exchanges and mobilities remained as important and familiar as they were. As a European Community action program, Socrates was established as a program to improve the quality of education by

covering all ages, to contribute to the development of human resources which focused on the context of lifelong learning.

While the main objective of Socrates was sustaining a highly-qualified education in a multicultural environment, strengthening the idea of being European, promoting awareness for all EU languages, supporting inter-institutional cooperation, encouraging mobility of students and teachers, sustaining academic recognition and encouraging exchanges of experiences are some of the other accentuated goals of the program (EP, 1995). Through Socrates, the objective of the institutions were gravitated to be more prominent in the international arena concentrating more on the idea of Europeanization and internationalization. To that, academic staff were not loaded by administrative workload as before; instead, International Relations Offices were founded to conduct the procedures (Maiworm &Teichler, 2002).

When examined structurally, Socrates absorbed eight actions as an umbrella program based on lifelong learning philosophy. School education, higher education and adult education, which are three thresholds of education life. The other five are horizontal programs, but the priorities of all were the same; strengthening the sense of Europeanization, stimulating innovative attempts and international cooperation, sustaining equal education opportunities at all levels of education and developing the general knowledge of European languages are common threads of all projects (Lasonen, 2009). Each program had a tremendous amount of participant and was supported financially. However, as indicated by the statistics of the EC (2006a), Erasmus was the most visible of the education programs, and it had the lion's share for funding. Due to all presented projects and opportunities, education was not limited to school buildings. Henceforth, employers, social entities, factories, local and regional governments, decision-makers all played an accessible and useful role (European Communities, 2002). The eight actions covered under Socrates are; Erasmus, Comenius, Grundtvig, Lingua, Minerva, Observation and Innovation of Education Systems and Policies, Joint Actions with Other European Programs and Accompanying Measures.

ERASMUS in Socrates which started as a separate program in 1987 was later implemented as a Socrates subprogram. It became the most remarkable program among the EU education programs. Although the financial support provided to the participants was insufficient, it turned out to be the most popular and known program hitherto established. Therefore, its name has been kept as it is. The program got its name from the famous theologist and humanist Desiderius Erasmus, and it also served as an acronym of European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University.

After inclusion as a sub-program under Socrates, some changes and innovations occurred in Erasmus although many features were preserved. The cooperation between student exchanges and higher education institutions continued to increase, academic staff mobility and curriculum development were and an opportunity for non-mobile students to benefit from exchange activities was provided (Lanzendorf & Teichler, 2002). Higher education had been responsible for decision making, the operation of the process and application for the grant rather than the departments for maximum of three years (Maiworm & Teichler, 2002). Furthermore, universities would be supported financially, teaching staff mobility would be more focused on the host institution's program of study, intensive program, in which students and staff could be together, had to be held, ECTS system would be more active, joint development of the education program had to be supported, and staff would be granted for their preparatory visits (Lanzendorf & Teichler, 2002).

Comenius was the first school education program and comprised the education from nursery to secondary school. The main aim of the project was to support education at all levels from pre-primary to secondary school (Gordon & Caille, 2000a).

Grundtvig, sustained education to everyone irrespective of age by taking the informal education into consideration as formal and vocational education. All related people as teachers, students, trainers, and all the staff responsible for adult education were the target groups of this program (Athanasίου & Anagnostopoulou, 2013).

Lingua supported participants at all levels in order to increase the quality and quantity of language learning in EU member states. Consolidating the European dimension and education in the unity, assisting citizens to be proficient at least in three languages was another objective (Gordon & Caille, 2000b). In Lingua, no language course or grant was provided directly to any participant or institution. Grant payments were made to the institutions and the institution carries out the transactions within the scope of the project. Individuals benefitted from project outputs such as CDs, books, magazines etc. (Çakır, 2010).

Minerva for Open and Distance Learning refers to providing education through multimedia resources everywhere. The main aims were to give the necessary importance to improve education services with information and communication technologies and multi-media-based education products and to facilitate access to developed, innovative methods and educational resources (Genç, 2005).

Observation and Innovation of Education Systems and Policies aimed to turn the diversity of the EU into an opportunity and take advantage of it through a range of initiatives and activities. Such as comparing national education systems and informing others through a network, visiting fields to observe the education systems, evaluating academic quality and academic recognition (European Communities, 2002).

Joint Actions with Other European Programs were the integration of education, training and youth programs under one policy to be more inclusive.

Accompanying Measures brought more flexibility to the program by organizing seminars and conferences, providing intercultural education and evaluating the projects (European Communities, 2002, p.10).

2.2.4.1.2. Leonardo Da Vinci

The internationalization of education and the compelling economic conditions required by the global world has led the EU to take measures regarding vocational education and training and providing assistance to the employment of young people. For

the very reason, competitiveness and entrepreneurship were centered and it was aimed to develop interaction between business sectors and vocational education institutions. In this respect, vocational education and training institutions, companies, business sectors, civil society organizations, and public institutions were the target groups of the program.

In addition to covering previous programs, Leonardo Da Vinci enabled different actions related to vocational education and training. Working with two or more partners in a project, emergence of Europass that is a certificate showing working experiences during mobility were advantageous sides of the program (Lasonen, 2009).

2.2.4.1.3. Youth

Apart from these two main covering programs the education of young people through different kinds of projects and activities were conducted by the Youth program. People between 15 and 25 could benefit from the program and develop their skills, creativity, solidarity and independence by taking active roles in the projects they attended (Genç, 2005) in the action of European Voluntary Service.

2.2.4.2. Lifelong Learning Program (2007-2013)

Lifelong learning philosophy has been around for fifty years. Although it emerged as a political favor in the early 1960s, the idea widely recruited many supporters and began to address larger areas. In those days, the idea of lifelong learning was mostly based on humanistic and radical reasons, albeit during the 1990s it veered and began to hinged upon economical and utilitarian causations. In progress of time, in that knowledge-based society the idea became a means of modernization of education (Field, 2001; Dehmel; 2006; McCombs; 1991). LLP is defined as all learning activity that are experienced throughout all stages of life embedded in all context from school to home with the aim of developing skills, knowledge in personal, professional or social perspectives (Power & Maclean, 2012).

Development in communication technologies, reaching to new information easily and the ageing society carried the education outside the classroom walls and informal education came into prominence not only for kids but also for adults. Since some

inadequacies and malfunctions occurred during eleven years of mobilities and exchanges, existing three programs had to be renewed, reorganized and the view of lifelong learning for everyone and for all ages was fostered since learning cannot be limited to school or the workplace. Today, people can easily access any information they need which makes lifelong learning more than a luxury but a pressing necessity (Fischer, 2000; Dehmel, 2006).

Coming to the end of Socrates, Leonardo Da Vinci and Youth programs in 2006, European education programs were merged into under the title of LLP in 2007 and lasted until 2013 because of sharing the same preamble. The inclusionary LLP was a venture that consists of education from childhood to old age by €7 million financial support (Lasonen, 2009). Henceforward the integrated program would comprise Comenius, Erasmus, Leonardo Da Vinci and Grundtvig as sectoral programs and two horizontal programs; Jean Monnet and Transversal Program. More attention was paid to the implementation and evaluation of programs at the instance of the Commission. The community tried to raise the awareness of member states to keep up with the ever-changing and developing technology in the globalizing world and give the point of view that education is not limited in schools and it is a continuing lifelong process and should be in accordance with vocational training because of unprecedented need for acquiring new competences and qualifications (EC, 2006a). In the Lisbon Council which was held in 2000, it was emphasized that in order to make Europe more competitive and arbiter in the world, lifelong learning was an indispensable key element of EU's general strategy (Dehmel, 2006).

2.2.4.3. Erasmus+ (2014-2020)

Erasmus program, the groundwork of which was prepared in the 1970s, came into force in 1987 and has been mentioned with many different programs since then. It was incorporated into the Socrates program, which was included in the Bologna Process in 1998, Lifelong learning program in 2007 and Erasmus + program in 2014. The name of

the program has not been changed during this period, and it has been the most known and active EU education program so far.

Using technology more in the labor market and the need for more innovative, creative, skilled employees is increasing the competition in the business world. Moreover, a system that allows citizens to be active in democratic life is necessary to be formed. A system through which European values, a sense of belonging to a community and social integration are fostered and violence is prevented are the needs of EU as clarified in Lisbon Treaty. Erasmus+ is one of the most robust instruments that help to sustain these principles in addition to preventing racism, radicalization, creating intercultural tolerance in society especially among disadvantaged groups with limited opportunities and migrants (EC, 2020a).

With the regulation of EP and EC, the Erasmus+ unifying education, training, youth and sports programs was established on 11 December 2013 (EU, 2013). In addition to Comenius, Erasmus, Grundtvig which were sub-programs of Lifelong Learning program beforehand, Youth Programs, Erasmus Mundus, Tempus, Alfa, Edulink, Programs of cooperation with industrialized countries in the field of higher education and sport programs have been gathered under one single umbrella (Tescasiu, 2014).

These actions have been collected under the symbol of “+” and have been divided into three main Key Actions (KA)¹ and two separate areas to be more understandable and descriptive.

- KA1- Mobility of Individuals (Mobility of students and staff, Erasmus Mundus, Erasmus+ Master Loans)

¹ Detailed actions are available in this link: https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus2/files/el_national_report/TR_National%20Report.pdf

- KA2- Cooperation for Innovation and the Exchange of Good Practices (Strategic Partnerships, Knowledge Alliances, Sector Skills Alliances, Capacity Building)

- KA 3- Support for Policy Reform

- Jean Monnet

- Sport

The Erasmus+ enables many opportunities such as cooperation and mobility with Partner Countries and Program Countries by supporting; non-formal, formal and informal learning in youth, education and training fields; cooperation and transfer of knowledge and; know-how in different areas related to sport and physical activities in order to fight against the high unemployment rate (EC, 2020a). Mainly young people who leave school at an early age and low skilled citizens who cannot keep up with developing technologies compose the highest unemployment rate. In addition to these people, disabled people and the ones living in remote areas are supported more in this new span. Apart from these conceptual renewals, simplified rules and procedures instead of fragmented structure and duplications are other facilities objected by Erasmus+. Upon the transition to Erasmus+ from LLP, there have been some changes such as:

- Together with Partner countries, mobility is possible in Program countries.

- Students can participate in the program more than once. Participation is possible at each cycle hereinafter.

- A new opportunity has been given to the graduated students. They can participate in placement mobility after graduation on condition that application must be done during formal education.

- Students are assisted with Online Linguistic Support.

- Postgraduates have been provided Master Loans (UA, 2020).

Depending on the lifelong learning perspective, these supports, which provide the development of knowledge, skills and abilities of individuals will support the development of institutions, organizations, and the development of Europe. What is more, the programs

have contributed participants to develop their academic and professional skills (Teichler & Jahr, 2001). Knowing and understanding different cultures, strengthening their self-awareness, self-confidence, developing a sense of belonging to a community and improving communication skills and language proficiency levels are other contributions of the program (Bağcı, Erdem, & Erişen, 2018; Jacobone & Moro, 2014; Altay, 2016). Especially in the period of increasing unemployment, providing extra opportunities to get a job and to develop of business and employment areas matter significantly.

Individuals, organizations and countries can participate in Erasmus+. Individuals take part in programs by means of an organization which is eligible and are supported financially. The eligibility of individuals and organizations can change in terms of the country. Although EU member states and candidate countries could involve in the Lifelong Learning Program, in Erasmus+ period the number of countries benefiting from the program has increased and has exceeded European borders. Eligible countries are divided in two groups as Program countries which can actively participate in all Erasmus+ actions and Partner countries which can participate in some of the actions on condition that they comply with certain conditions².

2.2.4.3.1. Student Mobilities

By means of student mobilities it is aimed to improve the qualifications of higher education students and to provide professional development opportunities. Moreover, increasing the educational opportunities and gaining necessary professional skills for those who continue their higher education or just graduated, and developing pedagogical skills are the intended goals of the action (UA, 2020). There are two types of mobility under this activity. One is mobility for study which takes place between 3 to 12 months and the other is mobility for placement which takes place between 2-12 months. Students can study in higher education or attend placement activities in a factory, or any eligible institutions.

² The list of eligible Programme countries and Partner countries are available in this link: (https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about/who-can-take-part_en)

Internationalization by student mobility is applied in two dimensions; degree mobility and credit mobility. Degree mobility encompasses completing the whole cycle to acquire a degree in Bachelor, Master or PhD degrees whereas credit mobility is conducted to gain credits in a university in Europe or in other partner countries (Wulz & Rainer, 2015). The recognition of these credits is catalyzed by ECTS which has been employed since 1989.

This full recognition is the essential provision of the Erasmus program. Learning Agreement (LA) signed by the student, host institution and home institution certifies the ECTS credits and study program. Students have to follow this agreement during their stay at the host institution. The collected credits during the exchange are shown in Transcript of Records and by Proof of Recognition they are recognized by both home and host institutions. These courses are included in Diploma Supplement, which is a universal document providing a detailed description of the courses such as content, level, the context of the studies that are completed during Erasmus, etc.

Since rapidly increasing official numbers, especially in higher education area, and so the budget, Erasmus has the lion's share among EU education programs. The adventure began with 3244 students in 1987 (EC, 2015a). In 2007-2013 there were 3.3. million students and in 2014-2020, 4 million students benefitted from the Erasmus program (EC, 2020e). These climbing figures are the indicators of Erasmus being the exclusive program of EU due to opening up life changing new opportunities for the participants (Caviezel, Falzoni, & Galizzi, 2020).

As the number of students is so high, the reasons for participating in the activity vary as much. Niederl and Bader (2014) state in their study that there are many personal and external factors affecting the decision on participating in student mobility programs. Personal factors can base on the learner's socio-economic situations, academic skills or previous experiences. Other reasons are divided into three main titles; reasons related to the home country and home institution, service presented in the host country and host institution, and cultural reasons (as cited in Wulz & Rainer, 2015). Social environments

religious reasons, living standards, security, the reputation of the higher educations, qualifications of the institution, tuition fees, recognition of degrees and even public transport systems and climate may be factors determined by the students (Özberk, Öztürk, Fındık & Kaptı, 2017).

2.2.4.4. Erasmus+ (2021-2027)

Erasmus + has opened up new horizons and offered opportunities to more than 4 million people with its budget of €14.7 billion during 2014- 2020 period. The program has proceeded very effectively and has been inscribed a success story, especially by the student mobility for tertiary level students. This success of the program has made it an essential tool to adapt EU policies, albeit a fine-tuning is thought as necessary in its implementation. However, it ends on 31 December 2020, and the successor iteration of the program will be inaugurated for next seven years.

Merging some previous programs into Erasmus+ in addition to the new education, training and youth programs with the introduction of sports caused heavy bureaucratic burden which disconcerted the compliance and relevance of EU policy. With the reason of being not equally accessible for all social groups especially for people with disabilities and fewer opportunities, insufficient linguistic support; participation of mostly low-skilled adults; third group countries being not able to participate in sports actions; limited support for disabled volunteers; the insufficient grant are the main existing problems that have been discussed in the meeting organized by EP on 30 May 2018 (Chircop, 2018).

In order to eliminate these obstacles, EC has proposed a program more inclusive, more user-friendly, more accessible and with more financial support by doubling the budget to €30 billion for the target of reaching 12 million participants which requires more labor. The difficulty of academic recognition of ECTS credits is one of the other issues that is pointed out to promote quality assurance and approval of informal and formal learning skills. Automatic recognition system will be used with the beginning of the new term. Sustaining civic education, European student e-card and active citizenship are the other essential services emphasized by Member States (EC, 2018b).

Basic structure will remain same consisting three main actions in addition to some new activities. Boosting EU identity and international dimension of the program are the same preliminary objectives of Erasmus+ (Perilli, 2017). In this context EC makes it clear that it is an evolution of the process rather than revolution. To lessen the bureaucracy, online tools will be used both by national agencies, by offices and by beneficiaries. Fundamental rights such as right education, nondiscrimination, equity between women and men, rights of the children, more integration of people with disabilities, fair and just working conditions will be protected. So as to reach more people and people with fewer opportunities, more flexible mobility formats such as short-term mobility and virtual mobility will be promoted. By extending usage of online tools Erasmus aims to enhance linguistic support. By e-learning opportunities easy access and flexibility will be possible (EC, 2018b).

2.3. Erasmus in Turkey

Following the Helsinki Summit in 1999 when the official candidacy process of Turkey began, Turkish NA was founded and the pilot schemes began in 2002. Since 2004, Turkish NA has officially run EU programs. As being the executive of the EU Education and Youth Programs, it started first exchange activities with LLP. In 2007, 129 universities were granted Erasmus University Charter, which enabled to participate in Erasmus actions.

Before being involved in the Erasmus program, the environment on Turkish universities was not considerably multicultural and internationally developed. However, as fundamentally required by the Bologna Process and Erasmus program, education system acquires to be developed not only culturally and scientifically but also internationally (Bostrom, 2010). Hence, through the integration of European education programs, Turkey had the opportunity to adapt its education policy to the globalized world and to the EU. Since the increasing interdependence and competition among nations have created the need to the internationalization of education, Turkey could not stay away from understanding the importance of experiences and knowledge of other nations.

Planning international strategies annually, intensive foreign language courses, curriculum developments, opening new lectures in English, exchanging academic and administrative staff, establishing Mevlana Exchange program and conforming to ECTS have been some changes of at initial stage. Owing to ECTS, the credits that mobile students have during abroad can be recognized and accredited by the home institution.

The process which began with 1142 outgoing students in 2003-2004 continued increasing and reached to 17,902 in 2017. The number of incoming students was just 299 in 2004, and in 2017 it increased to 2785. When students participated in placement mobility are added to that list, the number increases more. Finally, in 2019 the number of students for study and placement mobility increased to 170.000 (Güldü, 2019). These mounting large figures manifests Turkey as one of the most influential users that take advantage of the Erasmus+ offers (Çetinsaya, 2014).

2.4. Erasmus and Language Learning

EU attaches great importance to foreign language teaching. The EU is a project that brings different languages and cultures together and gives a new perspective to foreign language teaching. In the implementation of multilingualism, which is one of the important elements of the EU, education of at least two foreign languages is carefully emphasized in educational policy because it is believed that developing mutual understanding and collective conscientiousness is possible with common language systems (Güler, 2005).

In this context, The European Language Day, which was established in 2001 representing 47 countries is celebrated in every 26 September which indicates the resolution of protecting multiculturalism and multilingualism (EC, 2020b). By celebrating European Day of Language, it is aimed to increase the awareness of language diversity of the EU and promote this diversity by encouraging people for all ages who are helped to find jobs and grow in the business sector. Despite the attempts to develop the notion of multilingualism, it has been emerged that the first and the most extensively learned and taught language is English (Costa & Albergaria-Almedia, 2015). What is more, according

to the Europeans, English is found the most useful language (EC, 2006b). This is the manifestation of dominance of English in spite of other pertinent languages such as German, Spanish and French. This circumstance is advocated by the surveys that prove English as the most spoken foreign language over the continent while German, English and Italian are the most widely spoken mother tongues (EC, 2006b). Since English fulfils much more than being a second language, it has been clearly accepted as a world language, and it has become the lingua franca of the era as a consequence of being spoken more than %20 of the whole population of the earth.

The widespread preference for English in all areas has led to some innovations in education. In many countries, the official language in HEIs has become English due to the fact that in 1960s various universities, colleges have increasingly begun to accept international students and lecturers who have been teaching in mixed language audiences (Crystal, 2003; Lanvers & Hultgren, 2018; Phillipson, 2007). This is the evidence of English being dominant in all parts of educational domains that can be defined as the Englishization in education (Lanvers & Hultgren, 2018; Phillipson, 2007). It is true that this growing use of English has a great effect on the objectives of Erasmus students. Together with learning a foreign language, other objectives of the students are related to academic issues, self-development, travelling, new teaching methods, having a break and the desire to gain another perspective on one's own country (Coleman, 1988; Teichler, 2004).

Generally, the choice of the students when deciding on the country to study, the language they want to gain proficiency plays an important role. Correspondingly, Ireland, UK, France, Germany and Belgium host most of the mobile Erasmus students, especially the UK (Teichler & Maiworm, 1997). Today, Spain and Italy are added to that favorite destination list (EC, 2015a). Briefly, English speaking countries, big countries and big cities are mostly common preferences (Teichler, 2004). Though, because of being the language of science, technology, communication, international safety, health and education, English is the top language to be learned for communication when different

people with different native tongues and cultures come together (Seidlhofer, 2005; Firth, 1996). That's why, non-anglophone countries offer courses in English and publish them in ECTS catalogues which eliminate the possible disadvantages. For example, the number of outgoing students in Poland, which is not in the top attractive country list, has increased in the last few years. One of the most important reasons for students studying in Poland is the high number of provided English language courses (Lipowski, 2012). This increasing number of English courses which are offered to mobility students have made exchange programs much easier and enabled an active cooperation between higher education institutions and enhanced job opportunities which is resulted in an effective role of English in tertiary education (Björkman, 2013).

Thus far, it has been mentioned that English is the dominant language in every area and Erasmus students intend to improve their foreign language proficiency level, especially English. Nonetheless, the following fact should not be ignored. Participants should already have a good level of English in order to benefit from the Erasmus program. Inasmuch as, insufficient language knowledge has always been a handicap for participation to the program. To this respect, apart from Lingua, during LLP period Intensive Language Courses were arranged for students before mobility. The funding of the courses was granted by the sending institution's organizational support budget. This language support program has been evolved into a much more functional and effective version with the start of Erasmus+ period and transformed into Online Linguistic Support (OLS) which supplies free language courses and assessments.

2.4.1. Online Linguistic Support

Notwithstanding the fact that developing language proficiency is one of the first objectives of Erasmus students, it is also the prerequisite to be able to benefit from the program. Inasmuch as lack of foreign language competence is a barrier to do Erasmus, to overcome this barrier, institutions may organize language courses for their students before mobility or European Commission supports participants in this regard. During LLP, host institutions were providing language courses in orientation weeks but with the

inauguration of Erasmus+, these linguistic supports have been carried into an online platform. Sustaining support to improve language proficiency levels and measure the language levels of the students before and after the mobility, OLS offers online language assessments and language courses for the mobilities which last at least two months. One of the main purposes of the system is to measure the contribution of the Erasmus+ program to the language levels of the participants. Moreover, OLS contributes to the policies of language diversity and knowing at least two foreign languages.

With respect to the official data of the EC, approximately 350,000 participants can test their language skills and improve these skills with online courses every year (EC, 2020f). Participants are subjected to two standard assessments which are applied before and after mobility. Optional language courses provide a good opportunity for students to improve their language skills. Although it is a significant opportunity to monitor the progress in the target language competence, excluding productive skills makes the system imperfect. OLS is available in all official European languages (EC, 2020f); however, the language studied to be is allocated by the International Relations Office according to the language of instruction of the host institution. After the allocation, participants are sent a password to be able to log in and create OLS profiles. They enter the dates of mobility written in acceptance letter received by the host institution. The dates of the pre and post-tests are determined according to this arrival and departure dates automatically (EC, 2020f). The OLS language assessment consists of 55 questions testing for reading comprehension, listening comprehension, grammatical competence, and competence in vocabulary. Questions are progressive and are adapted to the language level of the participant. The assessment consists of 20 grammar, 15 vocabulary, 10 listening and 10 reading questions. Levels of each skills are evaluated in line with the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) (Erasmus+ OLS, 2020).

In order to assess participants' grammatical competence, multiple-choice and gap-filling questions are asked. In the vocabulary part, participants answer multiple-choice and gap-filling questions by determining the right words, expressions or phrases. Listening

part consists of multiple-choice questions, or identify the correct word, phrase or appropriate conversations. In the reading part, authentic texts are used from a letter, a newspaper, a book etc. and participants are supposed to answer inference questions (Erasmus+ OLS, 2020).

Based on their evaluation results, participants are offered optional online language courses in order to develop their foreign language skills in addition to tutoring sessions for small or broader groups and forums. The courses are based on three key learning principles: immersion, practice and spiral learning offered in all six CEFR levels (Erasmus+ OLS, 2015). The collected data of the students are controlled by International Relations Offices and both National Agencies and European Commission can utilize the results for statistical purposes.

2.4.2. CEFR

CEFR is a universal standard used to describe language proficiency levels. This program explains in detail what foreign language learners require to know in order to communicate in the target language and what knowledge and skills they need to develop in order to gain expertise in that language, as well as explaining which language level involves which skills (Başol & Sarıçoban, 2019). The principle is ground on preserving the multilingual texture of EU especially the least spoken ones by encouraging its citizens to be at least bilingual to construct a trustworthy structure in which language proficiency levels are tested that are learned in different educational atmospheres (Mirici & Kavaklı, 2017). It includes a table of indicators showing the levels of foreign language learning and teaching. The six broad levels are; breakthrough (A1), way through (A2), threshold (B1), vantage (B2), effective operational proficiency (C1) and mastery (C2) which are actually classical division of elementary, intermediate and advanced levels (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 21). The Table 2.2 below presents a summary of Common Reference Levels in general that helps teachers and curriculum planners rather than self-evaluation.

Table 2.2 CEFR levels of foreign language learning and teaching

General Linguistic Range	
C2	Can exploit a comprehensive and reliable mastery of a very wide range of language to formulate thoughts precisely, give emphasis, differentiate and eliminate ambiguity. No signs of having to restrict what he/she wants to say.
C1	Can select an appropriate formulation from a broad range of language to express him/herself clearly, without having to restrict what he/she wants to say.
B2	Can express him/herself clearly and without much sign of having to restrict what he/she wants to say. Has a sufficient range of language to be able to give clear descriptions, express viewpoints and develop arguments without much conspicuous searching for words, using some complex sentence forms to do so.
B1	Has a sufficient range of language to describe unpredictable situations, explain the main points in an idea or problem with reasonable precision and express thoughts on abstract or cultural topics such as music and films. Has enough language to get by, with sufficient vocabulary to express him/herself with some hesitation and circumlocutions on topics such as family, hobbies and interests, work, travel, and current events, but lexical limitations cause repetition and even difficulty with formulation at times.
A2	Has a repertoire of basic language which enables him/her to deal with everyday situations with predictable content, though he/she will generally have to compromise the message and search for words. Can produce brief everyday expressions in order to satisfy simple needs of a concrete type: personal details, daily routines, wants and needs, requests for information. Can use basic sentence patterns and communicate with memorized phrases, groups of a few words and formulae about themselves and other people, what they do, places, possessions etc. Has a limited repertoire of short memorized phrases covering predictable survival situations; frequent breakdowns and misunderstandings occur in non-routine situations.
A1	Has a very basic range of simple expressions about personal details and needs of a concrete type.

(Council of Europe, 2001, p.110)

2.5. The Effects of Study Abroad on Linguistic and Academic Competence

2.5.1. Linguistic Competence

Competence, in general, is a good deal of cognitively controlled skills in related domains. It refers to knowledge and ability to handle with the problems in those domains and acquire through practicing over time and gaining experience (Lehmann, 2007). One of the ways to evaluate these linguistic skills is the established standard CEFR.

Linguistic competence is the notion that is associated with Chomsky who discriminates competence which means knowledge of a language and performance which means using the language in a real environment. As Chomsky (1965, p. 3) expresses:

Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interests, and errors.

In this definition the focus is on grammatical transformation, which helps speaker to understand and use the language in competence theory of Chomsky. Another linguist and anthropologist, Hymes (1972) claims that this Chomskyan theory is precise and explicitly defines the theory but omits the social-cultural dimension which is as significant as the grammatical side. This communicative competence theory has become increasingly accepted in language teaching and is categorized by Canale and Swain into components: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence (Lehmann, 2007). Therefore, linguistic competence is not only based on the language system that helps to form well-formed sentences but also sociocultural and communicative strategies. In other words, as articulated by Saussure (1916), linguistic competence should be assessed holistically because of consisting many factors in itself, and social and individual sides cannot be thought separately (as cited in Lehmann, 2007). For this very reason, language is not composed of only grammatical, lexical, phonological or pragmatic structures but also colors, sounds, shapes and emotions; in short, it is to experience every part of life. Other domains, such as oral proficiency, lexical knowledge, writing, reading, are equally important and needed to be developed.

One of the most stated objectives of studying abroad is improving proficiency in foreign language as aforementioned. This is because interaction with native speakers provides an excellent opportunity to practice the target language in its real and authentic environment. Through this non-stop immersion, students can improve every domain of their language competence (Kington, 2011; Doerr, 2019; EC, 2015a). Owing to being exposed to rich and real-life input combining formal and informal setting and having more opportunities to use English to interact with foreigners, students can put the knowledge they have learned into practice and develop real-life communications (Collentine & Freed, 2004; Pinar, 2016; Polio & Zyzik, 2009) more than at home (AH) context (Llanes, Arno & Mancho-Bares, 2016).

Without surprise, the SA context is one of the most effective ways fostering linguistic independence in second language (L2) and foreign language (FL). The flow of inbound students generally occurs in non-anglophone countries (EC, 2018c). Although there have been few studies investigating the effects of SA in these countries, it has shown that even if the students do not necessarily learn the host countries' native language but learn and practice English as lingua franca, spending academic term abroad results with significant linguistic gains particularly oral skills (Llanes et al., 2016; Collentine 2009). To be sure, by dint of offering a rich nature of L2 input, the popularity of SA programs in need of L2 development has increased dramatically. Primarily through the Erasmus program, a considerable increase can be seen in the number of mobility students. The common language that combines these students from different nationalities is English which is the lingua franca of today's globalized and internationalized world. However, all of the participants do not have the opportunity to study in anglophone countries. Therefrom, while some universities determine their official teaching language as English, others try to become more attractive by increasing the number of English courses. Therefore, participant students may improve their FL abilities thanks to the common languages they have to use for socialization, academic or linguistic purposes. In this context, there have been many studies conducted to examine how effective SA context is on students' L2 and FL development.

The studies investigating the SA effect on language proficiency have mostly focused on pragmatic competence, cultural competence and speaking and listening skills. Little attention has been paid on the gains of other skills, especially on reading proficiency (Taillefer, 2005; Li, 2015). In this study, the effect of studying abroad on linguistic competence is measured by OLS test results. The system evaluates the developments in four competences which are grammar, vocabulary, reading and listening but the effects on other competences have been reviewed in literature as presented below.

2.5.1.1. Effects on Grammatical Competence

Investigations upon the relationship between SA and level of grammatical competence are very speculative so do not provide consistent results. While most of them reveal a lack of support between these two variables, a few studies are demonstrating a positive correlation.

For instance, in the investigation conducted by DeKeyser (1991), progress on grammar proficiency levels of SA students was not better than their AH peers in tandem with the explicit teaching of rules providing a perpetual opportunity. Therewithal, in a study comparing SA and AH groups studying Spanish as L2, it is found that AH group cemented grammar proficiency more than SA group while SA group were able to produce more meaningful sentences (Collentine, 2004). Another study by O'Donnell (2004) comparing 37 students from AH and SA contexts found no strong positive relation between SA context and development of grammar proficiency. Moreover, Juan-Garau and Perez-Vidal (2007) documented that mobile students did not significantly improve in L2 accuracy development.

Unlike these studies which have found out almost no effect of SA context on L2 accuracy, there have been some studies revealing the positive effects and reduction of some specific types of errors (Llanes, 2012). It was also claimed by Llanes and Munoz (2009) that even 3 or 4 weeks of staying abroad cemented the grammatical skills in addition to other linguistic competences. The researchers observed that even though the time spent abroad was so short, participants began to use less erroneous structures in

sentence setups further to reducing morphological, syntactic and lexical errors. In another study by Möhle and Raupach (1983) investigating German learners of French and French learners of German, it was suggested that there was a little positive change in learners' grammatical competence, but there was a noticeable reduction in terms of formal errors (as cited in Regan, Howard, & Lemee, 2009). Walsh (1994) observed Irish learners of German and also found a little progress which was thought to be based on a lack of linguistic awareness. In conclusion it is elucidated that natural language environment which is flourished by extensive input and interaction fosters grammar proficiency levels and makes a significant progress in target foreign language even in short-term mobilities (Grey, Cox, Serafini & Snaz, 2015).

2.5.1.2. Effects on Vocabulary Competence

Likewise, in grammatical development, the effects of SA context on vocabulary competence may also be contradictory, though to a lesser extent. For example, in a research comparing SA and AH groups that were based on diary data analysis for a deeper understanding of learners' perception of language learning it was found that although SA groups were exposed to formal language classes more and experienced real-life input more than AH learners, the latter group surpassed the first group in many grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary measures which may be out of the ballpark (O'Donnell, 2004). Collentine (2004) found same puzzling results in his study by comparing formal Spanish learners in the United States and outbound learners spending a semester in Spain. Both groups had similar lexical scores, excluding adjectives. However, SA learners produced semantically dense lexical types owing to practicing daily speech more than AH learners.

Contrary to these findings, Milton and Meara (1995) believed that SA context prevailed AH context in terms of vocabulary improvement. The target of the FL of subjects was English, and they improved five times quicker than the classes they took at home when compared to the proficiency levels beforehand. The learners who became more competent were those who began at a relatively low level, that is, more progress was

observed in weaker students. On the way around, the reverse was investigated in another study conducted by Ife, Boix and Meara (2000) with SA Spanish learners who were mobile students for four to nine months abroad. According to this research development in the vocabulary competence was observed mostly in intermediate learners. Similarly, DeKeyser (1991) claimed that American mobile students could expand their vocabulary during their study in Spain. Supporting this finding, the pre and post-test results indicated the development of vocabulary and ease of expression skills.

2.5.1.3. Effects on Reading Competence

Reading competence occupies the most important position among the four basic language skills. While writing and speaking are productive skills, reading and listening are determined as receptive skills. By reading the given message through letters or sounds are transformed into meaning. In this respect, reading competence can be defined as extracting meaning from a text and then interpreting it (Grabe & Stoller, 2013). Within this context, it is clear that reading is regarded both as a process of language and as a product, that is, the meaning obtained in the reading process is evaluated as a product of this process.

There are many ways to upskills reading competence but Richards and Renandya (2002) state that reading looms large in improving foreign language learning and add that individuals who want to cement their FL capacity should set reading competence as the most important goal. In this respect, increasing number of students demanding to progress in English be a part of exchange programs such as Erasmus and have to do lots of reading during this process. After they return to their home institutions, it is seen that students improve their self-efficacy in reading competence (Sağlamel & Doğan, 2016).

There have been numerous studies searching the association between sojourn abroad and language development. However, they are mostly centered upon productive skills not upon the development of literacy skills. One of the limited studies belongs to Fraser (2002) who compared two groups of students, one of which participated in a mobility program for one semester, and the other one participated in for a full year in Germany. The pre and

post-tests applied to both groups concluded that SA improved reading and writing skills of these students, especially the ones who stayed for two semesters. In another study by Huebner (1995) comparing SA and IM (intensive domestic immersion) contexts among students with no prior exposure to Japanese as target language with qualitative methods, it was found that SA students progressed their reading skills more than students in IM context. Students who were exposed to foreign reading scripts afforded by SA program were better at reading comprehension, especially at the beginning level of the FL study. Dewey (2004) made a similar comparison. He compared a group of students studying Japanese in an intensive program in Japan and another group involved in an intensive Japanese program in the United States. Pursuant to this study, although SA students confided in their reading skills more, free recall and vocabulary tests concluded no observable difference between two groups. However, as the students' self-confidence developed during SA, they could react to the texts more actively and emotionally and were more efficacious in reading skills than their IM counterparts. Furthermore, Taillefer (2005) reinforced the support of SA either for one or two semesters on reading ability of the participants; even though sociolinguistic backgrounds and academic literacy of the students caused inconstant results.

Last but not least, in the study collecting both qualitative and quantitative data for a better understanding of the development of reading skills, Li (2015) compared learners of Chinese in SA and AH contexts. It was found that while AH students were exposed to more formal classroom learning, SA students had more exposure to an authentic environment like reading materials and culture that caused SA students to get more proficient in reading. Nevertheless, beginners in the SA context were not lucky enough as AH students. Due to their limited language ability, they could not make the best of studying abroad.

2.5.1.4. Effects on Listening Competence

A person who can write, read, listen and speak properly means a proficient language learner. Even so, the studies so far verify that reading and listening are the receptive skills

that are critically important to be able to get involved in oral communication and receive information for oral sources (Cubillos, Chieffo & Fan, 2008; Saville-Troike, 2006). Studying abroad to beef up and consolidate the listening skills have been studied by many researchers and the results based on the development of listening ability are relatively consistent (Cubillos et al., 2008; Brecht, Davidson & Ginsberg, 1995; Kinginger, 2008).

For example, Davie (1996) came to a conclusion in his qualitative research that 14 students who spent one semester in Russia improved their general knowledge of Russian. Among four skills, listening was the most developed skill which was followed by speaking, reading and writing respectively. In another study comparing the proficiency levels of languages before and after the program, Llanes and Munoz (2009) documented that 24 English language learners scored higher results than pre-test scores from listening tests. The speaking, reading and writing competences also progressed subsequently. Additionally, Allan and Herron (2003) found significant development in French listening skills as a consequence of the SA context.

Cubillos, Chieffo and Fan (2008) compared 140 American undergraduates in SA and on-campus contexts for a five-week intermediate Spanish course. Both groups achieved equal progress, especially in dialogue and short narrative sections, but SA students got more successful in the long narrative section. Additionally, it was ascertained that SA students mostly used top-down and social listening strategies which reinforced them to be more self-confident, whereas on-campus students tended to use bottom-up strategies which are less productive. This development was obviously observed among already highly-competent students. Due to being exposed to 'interactive competence' and listening comprehension activities in a natural environment more than AH learners, studying abroad seemed to have a positive effect on listening proficiency (Kinger, 2008; Beattie, Valls-Ferrer, & Perez-Vidal, 2014).

2.5.1.5. Effects on Writing Competence

Although writing competence is a popular research area related to SLA context, little research has been done to understand how promoting SA is for writing skills of the

learners (Perez-Vidal & Juan-Garau, 2011; Perez-Vidal & Barquin, 2014; Isabelli-Garcia, Bown, Plews, & Dewey, 2018).

In a longitudinal study conducted by Perez-Vidal and Barquin (2014), 72 non-native speakers (NNSs) were examined nearly for 30 months based on AH context and SA context following AH context again. During SA period, students did not take any formal writing courses, but their fluency progressed significantly in addition to accuracy in contrast with prior and final AH contexts. The gains collected while studying abroad maintained at home, and even 15 months later, lexical complexity and accuracy continued to progress while fluency domain regressed.

By examining three groups of students: one sample group of SA context and two samples of AH context who were instructed in semi-intensive and intensive English courses as the target language, Serrano, Llanes and Tragant (2011) came across comparative results. Learners' written and oral skills were tested and SA students outperformed their counterparts from variables such as semi-intensive program in fluency and lexical complexity. Meanwhile, there was not a significant difference in written performances between SA students and intensive program students that signified the equal advantage of both contexts for L2 development. Regarding to a later study that scrutinized L2 development of 39 Erasmus students studying in non-anglophone countries for one semester, SA context was discovered as favorable in improvement of L2 as a consequence of better overall English proficiency and better written lexical complexity (Llanes et al., 2016).

Apart from these investigations, Sasaki (2007) compared seven Japanese higher education students who visited anglophone countries through a SA program for four to nine months with their six peers who stayed in Japan and studied British and American cultures in respect of L2 writing behavior. Following a year of investigation, both groups go more proficient in the target language; however, only SA group became more motivated and confident and intended to write better compositions while AH group did not show progress in writing quality and fluency.

Conversely, Llanes and Munoz (2012) compared children and adult learners in SA and AH contexts. The analyzed results determined that SA context was more advantageous for children, especially for comparative gains, whereas adult learners outscored children concerning written measures because of being more concentrated during instructed settings.

2.5.1.6. Effects on Speaking Competence

The increasing number of studies investigating the effect of SA context on foreign or second language development centers upon speaking skills. Despite the contrast in results in general, most of the studies evince the progress in oral fluency to a significant degree after spending some time abroad (Lennon, 1990; Juan-Garau & Perez-Vidal, 2007; Lopez-Serrano, 2010).

For instance, in Freed's (1995) study, two groups of students learning French at home in the USA and in France as mobility students spending a semester there were analyzed. The study demonstrated that SA students were tended to speak more and at a faster rate with less dysfluent silent pauses and less lexical mistakes than AH group. Depending on students' self-assessment through pre-visit and exit questionnaires, Lapkin, Hart and Swain (1995) compared 'a core French group' and 'Francophones'. After francophones spent their three months sojourn, they showed more linguistic progress than their AH counterparts, i.e., core French group. Thanks to crucial natural learning experiences, good informal language practice and sustained interactions with NSs and/or NNSs, SA students were able to achieve significant linguistic gains especially in oral and aural skills. Similar results were obtained by Kang (2014) who enquired 60 Korean students who sojourned in anglophone countries. As students were more willing to communicate, their speaking abilities got effected positively and it triggered overall linguistic competence development. Actually, there was a mutual relationship.

On the contrary, there are some examinations sharing a reverse conclusion. Teichler and Maiworm (1997) conducted a survey to Erasmus students who were already competent enough in the target FL and evaluated their linguistic, academic and cultural

achievements before and after the mobility. Students were ascertained to improve their passive skills, i.e., listening and reading more than active skills, i.e., speaking and writing during SA. Consistent with students' replies it was also emphasized that, a long-term development in L2 proficiency was expected as a result of frequent usage of target language. Likewise, in another study exploring the development of overall English development in non-anglophone countries, the progress in speaking skills was less than expected after spending a term abroad (Llanes et. al., 2016). Since most of the SA students had difficulties in understanding their interlocutors' especially during the first weeks of the mobility program, they did not show more considerable development in respect of oral skills than AH students and English as a Lingua Franca Study Abroad students. This investigation can be explained as studying at home, in an anglophone country or in a non-anglophone country do not make any difference in getting more proficient L2 speaker because the thing that determines the success in speech rate and spoken breakdown fluency is the amount of meaningful interaction with others (Koylu, 2016).

2.5.2. Academic Competence and the Effects of Study Abroad

Since its launch in 1987, Erasmus has promoted and supported tertiary level student mobility, and it has been aimed to enable students to expand their visions by giving an opportunity to study outside their home countries, increase the quality of education and boost creativity. For over three decades, owing to sustaining education and training opportunities abroad, promoting better job opportunities, triggering foreign and second language proficiency, the number of participants increased remarkably and still the growth is going on.

The reasons of participation are diverse and range from linguistic development to intercultural competency and from employability prospects to academic achievement (Teichler, 2004; Botas & Huisman, 2013; Di Pietro, 2015; Mızıkacı et. al., 2019; Bağcı et. al., 2018). In order not to let students assess the program just as “sponsored visits” (Juvan & Lesjak, 2011), the benefits should be clarified with strong investigations.

Academic reasons can also vary within themselves. While some students consider it as passing the exams (Juvan & Lesjak, 2011), others participate in the exchange

programs to change academic environments and acquire knowledge that is not likely to be given at home institution (Teichler, 2004). Therefore, it is understandable that some of the students are concerned about if they study abroad, their GPAs will decrease and graduation will delay (Xu, DeSilva, Neufeldt, & Done, 2013). However, Sutton and Rubin (2004) explore that SA adds value to the participants' academic achievements and it is not confounding to obtain higher GPAs of students sojourn abroad.

Academic qualification does not only mean higher grades because “study skills, academic motivation, interpersonal relations, academic self-concept and academic skills” are the prerequisites which affect academic competence (DiPerna & Elliot, 1999, p. 208). Through this experience of lifetime, students already acquire these skills and revitalize their old tendencies by means of being have to live in a different country, meeting different people from different nationalities, experiencing different education methods (Tekin & Gencer, 2013; EC, 2014).

The studies investigating the effects of studying abroad on academic competence are not less than studies on language development (Kumpikaite & Duoba, 2013; Bryla, 2015). Although, there are some investigations advocating the reverse, most of the conclusions support the general belief of positive correlations between SA context and academic achievement (Maiworm, 2001).

In the study that is conducted by Maiworm and Teichler (2002), students evaluated their own progress, and while clearly expressing that they had made positive cultural, personal and linguistic progress, they were cautious about their academic growth. Although there were students who claimed the SA context did not help for academic development, more than half of the students claimed the reverse, mainly the participants who studied in the Netherlands and Sweden. The students who visited Italy, Greece, Spain and France temporarily stated no educational value.

Advocating that academic success is not limited to grades, Cardwell (2019) not only compared the final degree grades of SA students and AH students but also made a qualitative analysis exploring how students felt about their mobility. He found out that SA context was beneficial for academic achievement and also helpful to deepen the

knowledge of the subject, raised self-confidence and maturity which made contributions to academic development.

Similar results were procured in another study which hinged upon students' statements. The study was conducted to scrutinize the relationship between development in academic success and the Erasmus program. Except for one, all participants declared the positive effect of SA on academic achievement. Because they believed that improved self-confidence, problem-solving ability, both interpersonal and intrapersonal competences, linguistic proficiency and lastly international experience enabled them to get to know themselves better, to understand what they do and do not want and therefore to draw a more successful career plan (Botas & Huisman, 2013).

A more detailed investigation covering thirteen academic years between 2001 and 2014 was carried out in another study and the GPAs of a large sample of students from departments of Economics and Business were observed. Instead of allowing students to evaluate themselves and obtaining results based on comments as in the aforementioned studies, this research was based on a concrete dataset. By measuring 6387 students' GPAs at different stages, it was found out that mobility programs had impressive contributions to students' academic performance. Regardless of gender or degree of the participants, the GPA during the activity period was higher than the GPA before departure. Another interesting result obtained in the study was that the academic development of mobile students vanished off when they return to their home university. However, they were still better than non-mobile students who had not participated in the exchange program before (Gonzalaez-Baixauli, Montanes-Brunet, & Perez-Vazques, 2018).

By presenting a different perspective, Camiciottoli (2010) stated that especially non-native speakers of English might be discouraged to be active during lectures and got more demotivated due to lack of academic listening ability and being have to conduct writing assignments which may force students. This reduced participation and unwillingness to attend classes would not result success either.

2.5.3. Challenges and Suggestions

It has become a commonplace to consider Erasmus and other SA programs are beneficial in improving cultural, personal, academic and linguistic competences of the participants. The increasing number of mobile students is both the reason and the result of this situation. Considering the Erasmus students' general views about the program, it is revealed in a study that Erasmus is believed to be an opportunity that should not be missed (Çepni, Aydın, & Kılınç, 2018; Bağcı et. al., 2018).

A program that is so beneficial to the participants and creates many opportunities does not mean that it is impeccable. Although the challenges may be highly subjunctive, the most-reported difficulties are mainly related to accommodation and financial issues. Academic problems regarding differences in teaching methods, having exams in FL, high level of academic courses, administrative and bureaucratic matters, are other challenges that are encountered mostly (Bracht et. al., 2006; Souto-Otero, Huisman, Beerkens, Wit, & Vujic, 2013; Aydın, 2012; Teichler & Maiworm, 1997).

One of the barriers for international mobility is related to accommodation as mentioned. The most frequently mentioned problems were poor quality student residences, unnecessarily expensive rooms, noise and distance from the university (Teichler, 2004). Some of the host institutions do not provide accommodation but instead make some suggestions and guide students. Trying to find a dormitory or a reasonable and economical apartment can destroy the whole experience and generally forces participants, and even some of them let go of their Erasmus dreams (Çepni et. al., 2018).

To investigate the most encountered challenges of mobility students, Teichler and Maiworm (1997) presented 20 possible problems and wanted students to rate them. Similar to previously mentioned study, more than fifty percent reported problems about accommodation. The other most common problem was about academic matters. Students had problems with recognition and credit transfers. Differences in learning and teaching methods and examinations were other academic challenges for those mobile students.

Administrative problems were mentioned as the most severe problems that students noted in Teichler's (2004) investigation. Greece, France, Central and Eastern EU countries

were the ones that administrative problems were encountered. In the study, it was stated that the source of that problem was that administrative procedures in those countries were already complex in social and academic life. Financial problems were not encountered less than these above-mentioned problems.

In another study by Yücelsin-Taş (2013) comprising 40 students who went to France as Erasmus students, the encountered challenges were classified in before, during and after mobility. Before mobility, students had difficulties mostly about administrative procedures, i.e., late arrival of documents, matching appropriate courses, finding accommodation and visa procedures. During mobility, they experienced more financial and academic difficulties and when they returned to Turkey, recognition of the courses was the biggest problem. Önen (2017) also classified the challenges of thirty Erasmus outgoing students according to the replies to an online quantitative questionnaire. As to this investigation, similar results were held as previously mentioned study in addition to the culture shock that most of the students felt when they return to their own countries.

As it is seen, besides being a program preferred by students, Erasmus program can be very stressful. No matter how hard the students, the institutions try, some difficulties may arise in anyway. Based on these findings, some solutions have been suggested by some researchers. For example, correspondence with institutions can be increased via more e-mails or telephone calls in order to sort out administrative problems and speed up documents' arrival. Many institutions that are sensitive about this issue do not make it necessary to have the documents physically. Rather accepting documents sent from official e-mails as legal documents is an operational solution. By the way this is one of the new regulations applied in the new period of Erasmus between 2021 and 2017. Further to that it is suggested to invite previous Erasmus students to orientation meetings so as to share their experiences so that mobility students to be can be prepared in case of problems (Yücelsin-Taş, 2013). Moreover, cooperation or bilateral agreements with institutions at home where students can practice before leaving may be a solution to ensure academic recognition of the courses. Students offered some solutions to their problems and according to their suggestions increasing grant amount, enabling convenience while

preparing documents, extra language support, mentor support and further information by coordinators are some of them (Bağcı et al., 2018).

In order to take on accommodation problems, HousErasmus+ project conducts many surveys and recommends concrete solutions. Using these surveys, it is revealed that host institutions and social media are primary sources to find accommodation. Unfortunately, it is also found out that discrimination can be expected and the group has many problems during seeking a suitable place to stay is the trainers (EC, 2017). The purpose of The HousErasmus+ project is to discuss the major housing problem in EU and exchange experiences between stakeholders (Kuzmane, Jahnke, Encinas, Alfranseder, & Fellinger, 2017).

Another backbreaking issue is the visa application process. Excessive visa fees, proof of financial status, extensive documentation, attitudes of intermediary representatives, the necessity of applying in person are the everyday challenges of outgoing students whereas incoming students have troubles because of appointment date which is nearly two months later after application and finding an agent to speak English (Özler, 2012). Since visa procedures are under the responsibility of the students, they should be careful and prudent at first. They should prepare the documents themselves by getting the necessary information from the official addresses about the application date, required documents etc. It can also be advised that students who will go abroad under the framework of Erasmus can be exempted from visa procedures (Yücelsin-Taş, 2013).

In order to minimize financial difficulties, each student can be given grants and the amount of grants can be increased, which is a decision to be made by the Commission. As for the FL problem, students should already have at least B1 level of English to benefit from the program; otherwise, the program may not be activated, or even bilateral agreements may be terminated. For students who are eligible to attend, extra English courses or other language courses can be given free of charge. Lastly informing students before leaving about the circumstances of the host country will help them to adapt to the new environment more quickly.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This chapter explains the model of research by portraying the research questions, participants and setting, data collection process, data collection instruments and analysis of aforementioned data. The study objects to explore; Erasmus students' beliefs about their academic competence before, during and after mobility; the difference between the initial linguistic competences consisting listening and reading comprehension and grammar and vocabulary competences; the relationship between the initial language proficiency in English with final proficiency levels; challenges that students encountered in the mobility process and what kinds of suggestions they produced to eliminate them. The research questions covering these targets are declared in the next title. In order to collect the necessary data for the research, a 38-itemed online questionnaire (apart from the items related to demographic information) and OLS evaluation results (including 10 items) are utilized. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire and evaluation results are presented in this chapter.

3.2. Research Questions

The objectives of the study can be expressed by the following research questions;

- 1) What are the beliefs of Erasmus EFL exchange students about their academic competences:
 - a) before mobility
 - b) during mobility, and
 - c) after mobility?

- 2) Do listening, reading, grammar and vocabulary proficiencies of EFL Erasmus students differ before and after Erasmus Program?
- 3) What is the relationship between previous proficiency level of listening, reading, vocabulary and grammar and students' linguistic competences after mobility?
- 4) What are the beliefs of Erasmus EFL exchange students about academic and linguistic challenges they encounter during mobility?
- 5) What are the suggestions of those Erasmus EFL exchange students to solve academic and linguistic challenges they encounter during mobility?

3.3. Participants and Setting

The sample size comprises of 213 respondents who are Turkish outgoing students from variable universities. Both coordinators and outgoing students were e-mailed and informed about the study and students were requested to join in the study by online questionnaire with the reason of no opportunity for physical access due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The respondents' demographic information based on gender, age group, study cycle, fields of study, academic year of attendance and countries visited are demonstrated in the following tables respectively.

Table 3.1 Portrays of the Respondents' Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	122	57.3	57.3	57.3
Female	91	42.7	42.7	100.0
Total	213	100.0	100.0	

The gender layout of Erasmus outgoing students is expressed in Table 3.1. It is obvious that current study consists of 213 participants in total. While many of them are male with the rate of 57.3%, female participants are less than males as represented by 42.7%.

Although male students outnumber female students in this study, it is generally analyzed that there is a gender gap and Erasmus program upholds female students. Since

the launch of the program, the number of girls participating in the program has been higher than boys (Martin, 2014; Maiworm, 2000; Faggian, McCann, & Sheppard, 2007) which is the reverse of the situation obtained from this research. According to Benedictic and Leoni (2020) who also find the same result in their study comment the situation as a concomitant of dense female student population in tertiary level of education.

Table 3.2 Portrays of the Respondents' Age Group

Age	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<19-21	92	43.2	43.2	43.2
22-24	97	45.5	45.5	88.7
25 and over	24	11.3	11.3	100.0
Total	213	100.0	100.0	

Table 3.2 elucidates that participants between the ages of 22-24 (45.5%) outnumber the participants between the ages of 19-21 (43.2%), that displays only 5 participant difference. The minority of the participants are at the age of 25 and over by occupying 11.3%.

The density between the ages of 19-21 also means that the number of first cycle students is higher in this study.

Table 3.3 Portrays of the Respondents' Study Cycles³

Degree	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
First Cycle	188	88.3	88.3	88.3
Second Cycle	24	11.3	11.3	99.5
Short Cycle	1	.5	.5	100.0
Total	213	100.0	100.0	

Table 3.3 implies that 88.3% of the participants are studying at first cycle and 11.3% are second cycle students while just 0.5% of the participants is at short cycle.

³ Cycle refers to the level of study levels of students according to European Qualifications Framework. Short cycle refers to associate degree, first cycle refers to bachelor or equivalent, second cycle refers to master or equivalent, third cycle refers to doctotal or equivalent degrees.

Table 3.4 Portrays of the Respondents' Fields of Study

Fields of Study	F	%
Archaeology	1	0.5
Horticulture	1	0.5
Computer Engineering	10	4.7
Environmental Engineering	1	0.5
Electrical and Electronic Engineering	2	0.9
Industrial Engineering	6	2.8
Agricultural Economics	1	0.5
French Language and Literature	3	1.4
Journalism	6	2.8
Genetics and Bioengineering	3	1.4
Food Engineering	3	1.4
Public Relations and Publicity	3	1.4
Geomatic Engineering	1	0.5
Nursing	7	3.3
Law	3	1.4
English Language and Literature	9	4.2
Biosystem Engineering	1	0.5
Business	14	6.6
Economics	5	2.3
Theology	1	0.5
ELT	1	0.5
Civil Engineering	8	3.8
Statistics	1	0.5
Public Administration	9	4.2
Chemical Engineering	3	1.4
Mechanical Engineering	13	6.1
Metallurgical and Materials Engineering	2	0.9
Landscape Architecture	3	1.4
Psychology	2	0.9
Radio, TV and Cinema	3	1.4
Advertising	1	0.5
Health Care Management	1	0.5
Primary School Teaching	2	0.9
Political Sciences	6	2.8
Social Service	1	0.5
Sociology	1	0.5
Town and Country Planning	1	0.5
History	2	0.9
Textile	1	0.5
Medicine	5	2.3
Soil Science and Plant Nutrition	1	0.5
Tourist Guiding	1	0.5

Tourism	6	2.8
Turkish Language and Literature	1	0.5
International Relations	33	15.5
International Trade and Logistics	1	0.5
Veterinary Medicine	4	1.9
Animal Science	1	0.5
TOTAL	213	100

Note: f = frequency, p = percentage

Table 3.4 indicates the departments of the participants. Upon the responses of the students, there represented 48 different departments. It is declared that 15.5% of the participants study at Department of International Relations with the highest rate. The second highest number of participants are from department of Business with the rate of 6.6%. Following that, department of mechanical engineering comes third with the rate of 6.1%.

When the distribution of the students by their departments in the world is investigated, it is found out that the majority of mobile students are from Business Administration and various Engineering departments which shows a consistent result with this current study (EC, 2020g).

Table 3.5 Portrays of the Respondents' Academic Year of Attendance

Academic Year	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
2015-16	26	12.2	12.2	12.2
2016-17	38	17.8	17.8	30.0
2017-18	42	19.7	19.7	49.8
2018-19	45	21.1	21.1	70.9
2019-20	62	29.1	29.1	100.0
Total	213	100.0	100.0	

The academic year of attendance is represented by Table 3.5. It is obvious that the congestion is between years of 2019-2020 with the number of 62 (29.1%) students. Afterwards, it is seen that the number of the participants from 2018-2019 (21.1%) and 2017-2018 (19.7%) are nearly same. Except that there are just 26 (12.2%) students participating in the program in 2015-2016 academic year.

Table 3.6 Portrays of the Respondents' Host Countries

Visited Countries	Frequency	Percent	Visited Countries	Frequency	Percent
Germany	15	7.1	Italy	16	7.6
Austria	1	.5	Latvia	6	2.8
Belgium	2	.9	Lithuania	17	8.0
Bulgaria	4	1.9	Poland	102	48.0
Czech Republic	7	3.3	Portugal	7	3.3
France	1	.5	Romania	14	6.6
Denmark	1	.5	Slovakia	2	.9
England	1	.5	Slovenia	2	.9
Spain	15	7.1	TOTAL	213	100.0

The sample group of this study participated in the Erasmus program in 17 different countries is rendered in Table 3.6. While there is just one student studied in England, the rest of the participants visited non-anglophone countries. The majority of the students were in Poland with the number of 102 (48.0%). Following that, Lithuania takes the second stage with 17 (8.0%) students. Moreover, Austria, France, Netherlands and England were visited by one student for each.

3.4. Research Design and Instrument

In this study, in order to explore the beliefs of students about the academic development before, during and after the Erasmus program, quantitative analysis is used. A questionnaire is developed to understand the general beliefs of EFL students and applied online. Linguistic competence of the EFL students is measured by utilizing the compulsory pre-test and post-test results of OLS to behold the difference before and after mobility. Besides, the initial grammar, vocabulary, reading and listening competence levels of the students are compared with their final degrees.

Moreover, the academic and linguistic challenges experienced by students and the provided solutions against these challenges are investigated through the questionnaire.

3.4.1. Questionnaire

During the preparation process of 48-itemed survey, many studies have been examined, especially the study by Di Pern and Elliot (1999), Cardwell (2019) and Erdoğan (2019) have become the source of inspiration.

The questionnaire consists of four main parts and is presented to students in Turkish. While the first part includes demographic information, the second part is designed to investigate the OLS pre and post-test results of the students. The third part is prepared to investigate students' beliefs about their academic competences before, during and after the Erasmus mobility and the last part covers the challenges that students had to live and the suggestions they found in response. A five-point Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree was applied in Part III and Part IV while for Part I and Part II students have to choose the appropriate option.

3.4.2. OLS Evaluations

OLS is provided by EC for tertiary level students who benefit from Erasmus either for study or for placement programs of at least two months and European Solidarity Corps participants. The main purpose of the system is to measure the contribution of the Erasmus program to the skills in the foreign languages that are used during abroad. OLS is available in 24 European languages. The online pre and post-tests that are prepared by the Commission are compulsory standard tests and students have to take the exams in determined period after being validated by International Relations Office. The exams test listening comprehension (10 questions), reading comprehension (10 questions), grammar (20 questions) and vocabulary competences (15 questions) by means of 55 questions in total which are multiple-choice and gap filling questions. The pre-test and post-test questions are not the same; however, the assessment principle does not change, and results of mentioned skills are evaluated and indicated in line with CEFR levels which are approved universally. Students do not have to take the test at one go. They can save their assessments and continue later. Completed parts cannot be repeated again. After

completing the tests, students receive a detailed analysis for each performance and also for overall evaluation.

The grades are from the lowest grade A1- to the highest grade C2. Participants are expected to have B2 before the study or placement period begins. However, if the participants get lower grades than B2, it does not prevent them to attend the mobility. The result is compared with the final exam taken after the mobility to understand the effect of Erasmus program on development of language skills.

3.4.3. Validity and Reliability of the Questionnaire

In order to eliminate the errors from the accumulated data the validity and reliability of the questionnaire is examined. Validity defines the accurately measured concepts in a quantitative study. “It is the category verifying whether the instrument covers all the content that it should or not” (Heale, Twycross, 2015, p. 66). Nonetheless, “reliability is the extent related to the consistency of a measure. Reliability test evaluates the level at which questionnaires avail uniform conclusions” (Oliveira & Martins, 2011, p. 119). In order to determine the consistency of the instruments, the most commonly used test is Cronbach’s Alpha which should present a number between 0 and 1 and minimum 0.7 which is the expected value (Heale, Twycross, 2015). The Table; 3.7, 3.8 and 3.9 below sustain the evaluation results of reliability of the questionnaire.

Table 3.7 Portrays of the Items of the Reliability Test-Cronbach’s Alpha Coefficient for Linguistic Competence Analysis

Items	Cronbach’s Alpha Values
Pre-Grammar	0.947
Pre-Vocabulary	0.947
Pre Reading	0.947
Pre-Listening	0.948
Pre OLS	0.946
Post Grammar	0.949
Post Vocabulary	0.949
Post Reading	0.948
Post Listening	0.949
Post OLS	0.946
Total	0.953

Table 3.7 declares Cronbach's Alpha (α) coefficient as 0.953 which is above the recommended value of 0.7. Hence, the reliability value is believed to be satisfactory. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for each item in terms of pre and post OLS evaluation tests the minimum obtained result is 0.946 which is the same obtained result for general OLS pre and post-tests.

Table 3.8 Portrays of the Items of the Reliability Test-Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient for Academic Competence Analysis

Items	Cronbach's Alpha Values
Beliefs on Academic Competence before Mobility	
1. I was worried about failing the course and decreasing the average score (GPA).	0,766
2. I was worried about how to follow courses successfully.	0,763
3. I believed that it would affect my career positively.	0,751
4. I believed to improve my professional skills.	0,752
5. I believed I would be better at developing new ideas with my future profession.	0,742
Beliefs on Academic Competence during Mobility	
6. I had opportunity to experience different teaching and learning methods.	0,745
7. I had opportunity to acquire different knowledge.	0,746
8. I had to easy access to extra materials and libraries.	0,740
9. Guidance and orientation meetings helped me to adapt to new environment.	0,742
10. I believed that academic quality of the courses was better than home institution.	0,773
Beliefs on Academic Competence after Mobility	
11. I have improved my grades.	0,752
12. I believe my self-confidence has developed.	0,748
13. I believe my academic achievement motivation has increased.	0,742
14. I have improved my communication skills with my classmates and teachers.	0,733
15. I have developed my problem-solving competences.	0,739

16. I am more motivated to continue for my post graduate education and academic research.	0,761
17. I believe that the connections I have established abroad thanks to Erasmus will create new job opportunities with a better salary.	0,751
18. My general knowledge about life has been affected positively.	0,737
Total	0,760

Table 3.8 indicates Cronbach's Alpha (α) coefficient as 0,760 which is above the standard value which means the reliability value of the part related to academic competence is satisfactory.

Table 3.9 Portrays of the Items of the Reliability Test-Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient for Challenges and Suggestions Analysis

Items	Cronbach's Alpha Values
Academic and Linguistic Challenges Encountered	
19. While preparing learning agreement, the number of English courses were limited.	0,634
20. I had to change initial courses in my learning agreement when I arrived at host institution.	0,658
21. Academic level of the courses were too high.	0,644
22. I had difficulty to adapt to new education system.	0,637
23. I had culture shock and it affected my motivation negatively.	0,654
24. I believed that teaching staff were not ready enough to help foreign students.	0,630
25. I had difficulty in following courses because of lecturers using native tongue.	0,634
26. I was not active both in class and with my friends because I thought my English was insufficient.	0,640
27. I didn't have enough opportunity to practice English outside the school.	0,691
28. I had difficulty in examinations because of my poor English.	0,640
Suggestions to Solve Academic and Linguistic Challenges	

29. I studied different but equally valuable courses.	0,649
30. I studied elective courses at host institution and left mandatory courses to be studied at home.	0,652
31. I found extra sources and did research to understand the course better.	0,636
32. I established a good communication with my lecturers and peers.	0,632
33. I spent more time with other Erasmus students and other host country people in order to keep up new environment.	0,635
34. I asked for more help from International Relations Office.	0,655
35. I took host country's native language course even though I knew it wasn't going to be recognized upon return.	0,653
36. I didn't spend time with my Turkish friends and tried to speak English more.	0,654
37. I worked in a part time job.	0,673
38. I prepared projects, home assignments or made presentations instead of exam.	0,641
Total	0,659

Table 3.9 indicates Cronbach's alpha coefficient as 0,659 for the data analysis of challenges and suggestions that students had during Erasmus period. The size of alpha is determined as 0,659 which means the value is satisfactory according to the following rule: "(0.93–0.94), strong (0.91–0.93), reliable (0.84–0.90), robust (0.81), fairly high (0.76–0.95), high (0.73–0.95), good (0.71–0.91), relatively high (0.70–0.77), slightly low (0.68), reasonable (0.67–0.87), adequate (0.64–0.85), moderate (0.61–0.65), satisfactory (0.58–0.97), acceptable (0.45–0.98), sufficient (0.45–0.96), not satisfactory (0.4–0.55) and low (0.11)" (Taber, 2017, p.1278).

3.4.4. Factor Analysis of the Questionnaire

Factor analysis is utilized in many fields such as social sciences, geography, economics etc. with the development of digital technology. The purpose of Factor Analysis is to monitor the relationship between variables in order to interpret and understand them more easily. "It is normally used to regroup variables into a limited set

of clusters based on shared variance in order to isolate constructs and concepts” (Yong & Pearce, 2013, p. 79).

Explaining whether the data is suitable for structure detection the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy test should be used and the value must be between 0 and 1 and be higher than 0,5 which means the closer it is to 1, the more suitable it is for factor analysis. If the value is lower than 0.50, factor analysis cannot be continued. Bartlett's test of sphericity test is used to test whether the data matrix is an identity matrix, and whether the correlation between variables is sufficient or not. When p value is less than 0.05 it demonstrates that a factor analysis is useful with the data (Kaya, 2013).

Table 3.10 Portrays of the KMO and Bartlett's Tests for Linguistic Competence

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy = 0,932 Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Approx. Chi-Square = 2234,991 df. = 45 Sig. = 0,000			
Factors	Factor Loadings	Mean	Standard Deviation
Pre-Grammar	0,870	3,75	1,169
Pre-Vocabulary	0,854	3,92	1,267
Pre Reading	0,850	3,95	1,233
Pre-Listening	0,837	3,87	1,335
Pre OLS	0,801	3,67	1,164
Post Grammar	0,754	4,60	1,097
Post Vocabulary	0,812	4,75	1,154
Post Reading	0,840	4,88	1,042
Post Listening	0,822	4,85	1,176
Post OLS	0,868	4,84	1,003

Table 3.10 exposes KMO as 0,932 which is >0.7 thereby demonstrating that the data fits for factor analysis. Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity ($\chi^2=2234,991$, $p<0.000$) marks the relationship between the items and proving that they are appropriate for factor analysis.

Table 3.11 Portrays of the KMO and Bartlett's Tests for Academic Competence

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy = 0,758 Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Approx. Chi-Square = 940,702 df. = 153 Sig. = 0,000			
Factors	Factor Loadings	Mean	Standard Deviation
Beliefs on Academic Competence before Mobility			
1. I was worried about failing the course and decreasing the average score (GPA).	0,767	2,71	1,258
2. I was worried about how to follow courses successfully.	0,773	2,37	1,379
3. I believed that it would affect my career positively.	0,547	3,68	,615
4. I believed to improve my professional skills.	0,635	3,08	1,177
5. I believed I would be better at developing new ideas with my future profession.	0,702	3,13	1,147
Beliefs on Academic Competence during Mobility			
6. I had opportunity to experience different teaching and learning methods.	0,584	3,13	1,128
7. I had opportunity to acquire different knowledge.	0,611	3,54	,618
8. I had to easy access to extra materials and libraries.	0,583	2,64	1,468
9. Guidance and orientation meetings helped me to adapt to new environment.	0,574	3,09	1,160
10. I believed that academic quality of the courses was better than home institution.	0,563	2,39	1,531
Beliefs on Academic Competence after Mobility			
11. I have improved my grades.	0,446	2,50	1,392
12. I believe my self-confidence has developed.	0,668	3,63	0,622
13. I believe my academic achievement motivation has increased.	0,624	3,14	1,156
14. I have improved my communication skills with my classmates and teachers.	0,625	2,85	1,355
15. I have developed my problem-solving competences.	0,702	3,18	1,171
16. I am more motivated to continue for my post graduate education and academic research.	0,647	2,56	1,411
17. I believe that the connections I have established abroad thanks to Erasmus will create new job opportunities with a better salary.	0,481	1,81	1,438
18. My general knowledge about life has been affected positively.	0,615	3,20	1,153

In Table 3.11 the appropriateness of the academic competence part of the questionnaire is evaluated for factor analysis. KMO as 0,758 which is >0.7 demonstrates

that the data fits for factor analysis. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($\chi^2 = 940,702$, $p < 0.000$) marks the relationship between the items and proving that they are appropriate for factor analysis.

Table 3.12 Portrays of the KMO and Bartlett's Tests for Challenges and Suggestions

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy = 0,715 Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Approx. Chi-Square = 628,510 df. = 190 Sig. = 0,000			
Factors	Factor Loadings	Mean	Standard Deviation
Academic and Linguistic Challenges Encountered			
19. While preparing learning agreement, the number of English courses were limited.	0,603	2,32	1,321
20. I had to change initial courses in my learning agreement when I arrived at host institution.	0,448	2,08	1,090
21. Academic level of the courses were too high.	0,670	2,18	1,249
22. I had difficulty to adapt to new education system.	0,552	2,45	1,300
23. I had culture shock and it affected my motivation negatively.	0,475	3,35	1,704
24. I believed that teaching staff were not ready enough to help foreign students.	0,594	2,95	1,157
25. I had difficulty in following courses because of lecturers using native tongue.	0,542	2,96	1,176
26. I was not active both in class and with my friends because I thought my English was insufficient.	0,534	2,90	1,308
27. I didn't have enough opportunity to practice English outside the school.	0,347	3,05	3,003
28. I had difficulty in examinations because of my poor English.	0,705	3,05	1,223
Suggestions to Solve Academic and Linguistic Challenges			
29. I studied different but equally valuable courses.	0,482	2,56	1,149
30. I studied elective courses at host institution and left mandatory courses to be studied at home.	0,582	1,60	,995
31. I found extra sources and did research to understand the course better.	0,479	2,49	1,301
32. I established a good communication with my lecturers and peers.	0,553	3,20	,984
33. I spent more time with other Erasmus students and other host country people in order to keep up new environment.	0,502	3,07	1,138
34. I asked for more help from International Relations Office.	0,549	1,86	1,258

35. I took host country's native language course even though I knew it wasn't going to be recognized upon return.	0,525	2,15	1,125
36. I didn't spend time with my Turkish friends and tried to speak English more.	0,561	2,15	1,357
37. I worked in a part time job.	0,494	1,47	,805
38. I prepared projects, home assignments or made presentations instead of exam.	0,338	2,49	1,226

In Table 3.12 the appropriateness of the challenges and suggestions part of the questionnaire is appraised for factor analysis. KMO as 0,715 which is > 0.7 demonstrates that the data fits for factor analysis. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($\chi^2=628,510$, $p<0.000$) marks the relationship between the items and proving that they are appropriate for factor analysis.

3.5. Data Collection Process

The questionnaire and the results of OLS tests are the main instruments of this research. The sample group is composed of 213 Erasmus outgoing students from Turkey who benefitted from the Erasmus program between 2014-2015 and 2019-2020 academic years. The questionnaire is presented to students in Turkish so that it will be more understandable for correct data and students can complete it more easily and eagerly. The coordinators of the International Relations Offices of all the HEIs and Erasmus Student Network (ESN) groups were informed and questionnaire was sent to them via e-mail as well as through social media and the official e-mail address used to reach to all universities at the same time. Nonetheless, the representatives of Gümüşhane University, Ondokuz Mayıs University, Selçuk University, Adnan Menderes University and Sütçü İmam University were reached separately and asked for e-mailing the questionnaire to their outgoing students. At the beginning of the questionnaire students are informed that their data would be kept private and utilized for an academic purpose. In order to fill Part II students, have to login their OLS accounts and transform their test results to the questionnaire. Afterwards the parts related to academic competence and challenges and suggestions proceeds and students have to mark the appropriate variable according to

themselves. It took weeks to gather sufficient feedbacks. At last, when the number of participants reached to 213, it was decided to end the questionnaire process.



CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1. Data Analysis

In parallel with the aim of the research, the data obtained from the questionnaire are outlined in detail in the following tables and graphs. In order to ascertain the results of the research questions and sub-problems, a quantitative analysis of the questionnaire has been reported. Opinions of the students about their academic competence; linguistic competence test scores as well as the relationship of these scores; the challenges encountered in the process of the Erasmus Program and the suggestions in response are reported in detail.

The collected data is input in the SPSS 25.0 software and the general information of the respondents are demonstrated in tables of a frequency distribution. Initially, in order to clarify the correlations between constructs factor analysis is applied in Part II, Part III and Part IV; for academic competence, for linguistic competence and for encountered challenges and suggestions. Additionally, normality tests are conducted to ensure whether the obtained linguistic data is normally distributed or not. Upon the arrival as the data is not normally distributed, the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test is applied to the related to OLS data.

4.1.1. Data Analysis of Beliefs on Academic Competence

The obtained data for the first research question investigating the beliefs of students about their academic competence before-during-after the Erasmus program is analyzed and demonstrated in the tables below. Items from 1 to 5 are analyzed in Table 4.1, items from 6 to 10 are analyzed in Table 4.2 and items from 11 to 18 are analyzed in Table 4.3.

Table 4.1 Beliefs on Academic Competence Before Mobility

PART III: Before Mobility	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Not decided		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	<i>f</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>p</i>
1. I was worried about failing the courses and decreasing the average score (GPA).	71	33.3	65	30.5	18	8.5	39	18.3	20	9.4
2. I was worried about how to follow courses successfully.	52	24.4	62	29.1	36	16.9	47	22.1	16	7.5
3. I believed that it would affect my career positively.	1	0.5	2	0.9	2	0.9	53	24.9	155	72.8
4. I believed to improve my professional skills.	1	0.5	9	4.2	22	10.3	89	41.8	92	43.2
5. I believed I would be better at developing new ideas with my future profession.	1	0.5	11	5.2	19	8.9	86	40.4	96	45.1

Note: *f* = frequency, *p* = percentage.

Table 4.1 clearly indicates that more than half of the participants remark their opposition to the first variable that searches whether the students were worried about decreasing their GPAs as a result of failing the courses abroad. The rate of strongly disagreed students are 33.3% and disagreed students are 30.5%. While this is the case, the number of students who were worried about being unsuccessful (18.3% agreed and 9.4% strongly agreed) were not few. The rate of those who were undecided were 8.5%.

Based on the data in the second assessment, it is consistently inferred that most of them (29.1% disagreed and 24.4% agreed) believed to follow courses successfully at host institution. While 22.1% of participants were concerned about it, the rate of strongly worried students is 7.5%. Besides 16.9% of the students stated that they were neither worried nor indifferent about following the lessons successfully.

In third item inquiring whether Erasmus program would affect their career positively or not, it is seen that the vast majority of the participants showed their approval (72.8% strongly agreed). While 24.9% of the participants believed that Erasmus program would make a significant contribution to their career, the rate of those who believed that it would not make any contributions at all was very low (0.5% strongly disagreed). The number of participants who disagreed and were undecided remained at the same rate with 0.9%.

The results obtained in the fourth item explores that 85% of the students believed in the contribution of Erasmus program to their professional skills. The rate of undecided students is quite low at 85%.

In the fifth item which is the last variable of this part, it is dedicated that the rate of students who believed that Erasmus program supported them in generating new ideas about their future profession. 45.1% of the students strongly defended the opinion but 40.4% leaned towards it. However, 8.9% of the students did not share their certain opinions.

Table 4.2 Beliefs on Academic Competence during Mobility

PART III: During Mobility	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Not decided		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	<i>f</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>p</i>
6. I had opportunity to experience different teaching and learning methods.	4	1.9	8	3.8	17	8.0	89	41.8	95	44.6
7. I had opportunity to acquire different knowledge.	2	0.9	2	0.9	1	0.5	84	39.4	124	58.2
8. I had easy access to extra materials and libraries.	2	0.9	15	7.0	43	20.2	81	38.0	72	33.8
9. Guidance and orientation meetings helped me to adapt to new environment.	3	1.4	10	4.7	19	8.9	88	41.3	93	43.7
10. I believed that academic quality of the courses was better than home institution.	18	8.5	34	16.0	44	20.7	45	21.1	72	33.8

Note: *f* = frequency, *p* = percentage.

As Table 4.2 explains, 86.4% of the students had opportunity to experience different teaching and learning methods (44.6% strongly agreed and 41.8% agreed). While 1.9% rejected the idea firmly, 3.8% of the students thought that they didn't get that opportunity. After all the percentage of the undecided students were more than the ones who didn't argue for.

A significant number of participants (58.2%) strongly agreed that they were able to acquire different knowledge. Similarly, 39.4% of the participants agreed with the statement. The percentages of those who disagreed and strongly disagreed were same whereas only 0.5% remained uncertain.

When it comes to statement 8, 38.0% of the participants claimed that they had easy access to extra materials and libraries while 7.0% of the participants thought the reverse. However, a considerable number of participants were uncertain (20.2%).

Regarding statement 9 related to the benefits of guidance and orientation meetings, the number of participants who strongly agreed and agreed were approximately same (43.7% strongly agreed and 41.3% agreed). The percentage of uncertain students (8.9%) were more than those who strongly disagreed (1.4%) and agreed (4.7%).

The participation to the statement comparing home institution and host institution in accordance with the academic quality is as follows. 33.8% of the students thought education at host institution was better. The number of students who agreed (21.1%) and who were uncertain (20.7%) were not so different from each other. However, those who thought home institution was better were 24.5%.

Table 4.3 Beliefs on Academic Competence after Mobility

PART III: After Mobility	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Not decided		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	<i>f</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>p</i>
11. I have improved my grades.	17	8.0	40	18.8	32	15.0	58	27.2	65	30.5
12. I believe my self-confidence has developed.	1	0.5	1	0.5	2	0.9	67	31.5	142	66.7
13. I believe my academic achievement motivation has increased.	5	2.3	11	5.2	17	8.0	78	36.6	102	47.9
14. I have improved my communication skills with my classmates and teachers.	2	0.9	20	9.4	31	14.6	75	35.2	85	39.9
15. I have developed my problem-solving competences.	1	0.5	6	2.8	20	9.4	80	37.6	106	49.8
16. I am more motivated to continue for my post graduate education and academic research.	11	5.2	28	13.1	36	16.9	73	34.3	65	30.5
17. I believe that the connections I have established abroad thanks to Erasmus will create new job opportunities with a better salary.	21	9.9	54	25.4	63	29.6	43	20.2	32	15.0

18. My general knowledge about life has been affected positively.	6	2.8	9	4.2	16	7.5	70	32.9	112	52.6
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Note: f = frequency, p = percentage.

When Table 4.3 which is about the beliefs on after mobility is evaluated, it is inferred that more than half of the students (57.7%) agreed strongly to the improvement of their grades. Nonetheless, 26.8% of them had claimed the opposite and quarter of the participants were undecided (15.9%). Consequently, more than half of the students believed their academic achievement motivation increased (84.5%).

Depending on the results of statement 12, nearly all of the students believed that their self-confidence developed (98.2%). Only 1% of the students thought the reverse and 0.9% were uncertain.

In statement 14, 75.1% of the participants are seen to improve their communication skills while 10.3% claimed the exact opposite. Even so the number of uncertain students were more than negative ones (10.3%).

Nearly half of the students (49.8%) believed their problem-solving skills were improved. Obviously, neutral students (9.4%) are more than those who shared their disagreement (3.3%).

Students' responses on whether to continue their postgraduate education after their mobility were almost evenly distributed rather than condensing on a particular area. 64.8% of the students were motivated to continue their post graduate education and academic research and 18.3% of them weren't motivated. Nevertheless, 13.1% of the students were in two minds about their future education after Erasmus.

As for the 17th statement, while 29.6% of the students were uncertain, 35.2% of them gave positive responses and 35.3% had negative beliefs on their connections established abroad would help to find highly-paid jobs.

The final statement at this part ascertains whether Erasmus program has an effect on their general knowledge about life. More than half of the participants strongly agreed that after mobility, their knowledge about life were affected positively. Though there are

some students who disagreed (7.0%). Moreover, the rate of uncertain students remained at 7.5%.

4.1.2. Data Analysis of Linguistic Competence

This section presents the analysis of linguistic competences. By comparing the compulsory pre- and post-test results of OLS, it is investigated whether there is a difference between the students' initial and final proficiency levels of listening, reading, grammar and vocabulary competences. The second analysis is done to find the relationship between initial CEFR scores of the students with their final scores. Thirdly, the frequency of main linguistic challenges is analyzed. The fourth and last analysis is conducted to evince which solutions were obviated against these challenges.

Due to test scores that are collected before and after Erasmus program are compared in the study, Sample Paired t-Test was thought to be applied. However, so as to decide to use this test, it should be tested whether the data is normally distributed or not. When data is normally distributed, one sample t-test should be applied, otherwise nonparametric tests should be preferred (Çimen, 2016). The table below illustrates the normal distribution tests of data collected from OLS listening, reading, grammar and vocabulary test results and average points.

Table 4.4 Tests for Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Grammar Exam	.195	213	.000	.907	213	.000
Vocabulary Exam	.207	213	.000	.900	213	.000
Reading Exam	.203	213	.000	.891	213	.000
Listening Exam	.210	213	.000	.911	213	.000
OLS Exam	.315	213	.000	.849	213	.000

Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) and Shapiro-Wilk (SW) tests hinge upon the correlation between sustained data and their corresponding normal scores. A significant statistic give rise to the researcher to refuse the assumption that the distribution is normal (Öztuna, Elhan, & Tüccar, 2006). The null hypothesis (H₀) of the KS and SW tests state that the

data are normally distributed, while the alternative hypothesis (H1) states that the data does not express a normal distribution. As seen in Table 4.4, the H_0 hypothesis is rejected for all tests and the test statistics are significant. Thus, it is discovered that the data does not have a normal distribution.

Since the data cannot meet the normal distribution condition, Sample Paired t-Test which was previously envisaged cannot be applied. Instead, “Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test” which is nonparametric equivalent of the “Sample Paired t-Test” should be used. The Wilcoxon signed-rank test is a non-parametric statistical hypothesis used to compare two related samples, matched samples, or repeated measurements on a single sample to assess whether their population mean ranks differ. It can be used as an alternative to the paired students’ t- test, t-test for matched pairs, or the t-test for dependent samples when the population cannot be assumed to be normally distributed. A Wilcoxon signed-rank test is a nonparametric test that can be used to determine whether two dependent samples are selected from populations having the same distribution. The test is named for Frank Wilcoxon (1892–1965) who, in a single paper, proposed both it and the rank sum- test for two independent samples (Wilcoxon, 1945). The test was popularized by Sidney Siegel (1956) in his influential textbook on non-parametric statistics. Siegel used the symbol T for a value related to, but not the same as. In consequence, the test is sometimes referred to as the Wilcoxon T test, and the test statistic is reported as a value of T.

The second research question inquiring the difference between students’ previous and final grammar, vocabulary, reading and listening competences are analyzed in Table; 4.5, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8, 4.9. Additionally, the relationship between these two variables is analyzed in Figure; 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5 which represent the third research question.

Table 4.5 Results of Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test for Pre and Post Grammar Exams

Pre-Grammar and Post-Grammar	N	Mean	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Negative Ranks	13	3.75	56.65	736.50	-	.000*
Positive Ranks	130	4.60	73.53	9559.50	9.193	
Ties	70	-	-	-		

* probability value < 0,05

Table 4.5 declares that there is a statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-grammar tests ($z = 9.193$, $p < 0.05$). This significant difference proves the development of students in proficiency level of grammar. Accordingly, 130 students increased their proficiency level in grammar while 13 students decreased their success and the grades of 70 students did not change. Considering pre and post-test scores, it is induced that the majority of the students is in positive ranks.

Table 4.6 Results of Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test for Pre and Post Vocabulary Exams

Pre-Vocabulary and Post-Vocabulary	N	Mean	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Negative Ranks	15	3.92	86.43	1296.50	-	.000*
Positive Ranks	138	4.75	75.97	10484.50	8.662	
Ties	60	-	-	-		

* probability value $< 0,05$

It is inferred from the analysis presented in Table 4.6 that there is a statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-vocabulary tests ($z = -8,662$, $p < 0.05$). This significant difference proves the development of students in proficiency level of vocabulary. Accordingly, 138 out of 213 students who had the exam increased their proficiency level in grammar while 15 of them declined their success and the grades of 60 students did not change. Considering pre and post-test scores, it is seen that the majority of the students is in positive ranks.

Table 4.7 Results of Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test for Pre and Post Reading Exams

Pre-Reading and Post-Reading	N	Mean	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Negative Ranks	7	3.95	67.00	469.00	-	.000*
Positive Ranks	134	4.88	71.21	9542.00	9.602	
Ties	72	-	-	-		

* probability value $< 0,05$

Table 4.7 deduces that there is a statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-reading tests ($z = -9,602$, $p < 0.05$). This significant difference proves the development of students in proficiency level of reading skill. Accordingly, 134 out of 213

students who had the exam increased their proficiency level in grammar while 7 of them declined their success and the grades of 72 students did not change. Considering pre and post-test scores, it is seen that the majority of the students is in positive ranks.

Table 4.8 Results of Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test for Pre and Post Listening Exams

Pre-Listening and Post-Listening	N	Mean	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Negative Ranks	11	3.87	74.45	819.00	-	.000*
Positive Ranks	139	4.85	75.58	10506.00	9.333	
Ties	63	-	-	-		

* probability value < 0,05

It is exposed in Table 4.8 that a statistically significant difference between the pre and post-listening tests ($z = -9,333$, $p < 0.05$). This significant difference proves the development of students in proficiency level of listening competence. Accordingly, 139 out of 213 students who had the exam increased their proficiency level in grammar while 11 of them declined their success and the grades of 63 students did not change. Considering pre and post-test scores, it is seen that the majority of the students is in positive ranks.

Table 4.9 Results of Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test for General OLS Evaluation

Pre- OLS and Post-OLS	N	Mean	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Z	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Negative Ranks	3	3.67	62.50	187.50	-	.000*
Positive Ranks	177	4.84	90.97	16102.50	11.875	
Ties	33					

* probability value < 0,05

The last analysis for second research question in Table 4.9 indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the general pre and post-test results ($z = -11,875$, $p < 0.05$). This significant difference proves the development of students in general proficiency level of English. Accordingly, 177 out of 213 students who had the exam increased their proficiency level in grammar while 3 of them declined their success

and the grades of 33 students did not change. Considering pre and post-test scores, it is seen that the majority of the students is in positive ranks.

The evaluation of the students' progress on their initial linguistic competence and final levels according to universal criteria of CEFR are illustrated in the figures below.

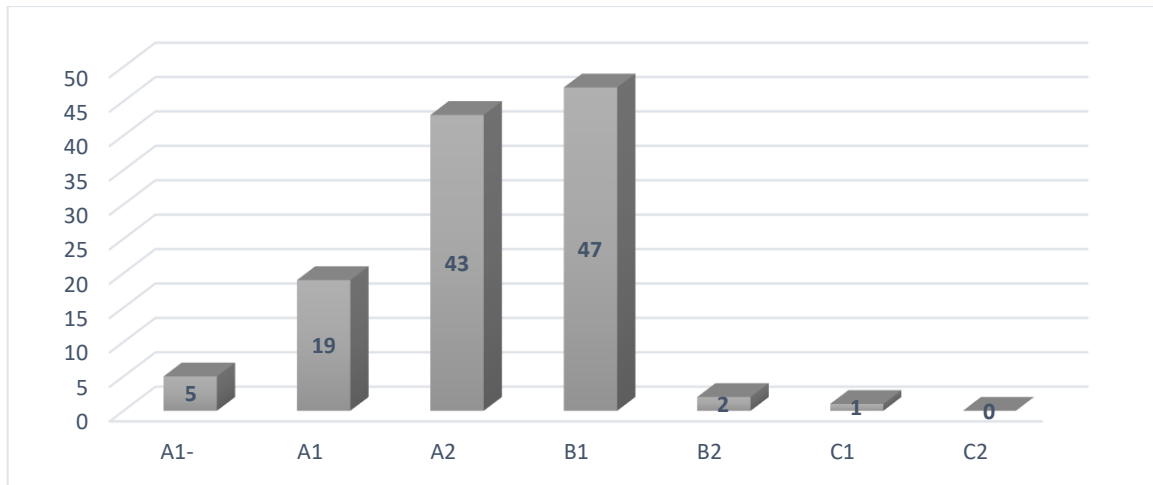


Figure 3: Net Number of Gain and Losses for Grammar Proficiency Level.

Figure 3 asserts that the levels of the students considering the evaluation of OLS grammar pre-test and the numbers in the charts refer to the net number of students who progressed. Within this context, it is clear that the highest development is seen among students who initially were B1. 47 students progressed from B1 to higher levels. A2 level students follows the group B1 with 43 students. Moreover, 19 students who were initially A1 improved their grammar proficiency level. Moreover, 5 A1- students, 2 B2 students and 1 C1 level student progressed and upgraded to higher degrees. As C2 is the highest level, there is no possibility to progress more; therefore, it is demonstrated as 0. In all aspects, 96 students who were not illustrated in this figure remained at the same level and there was no change between initial and final grammar proficiency levels.

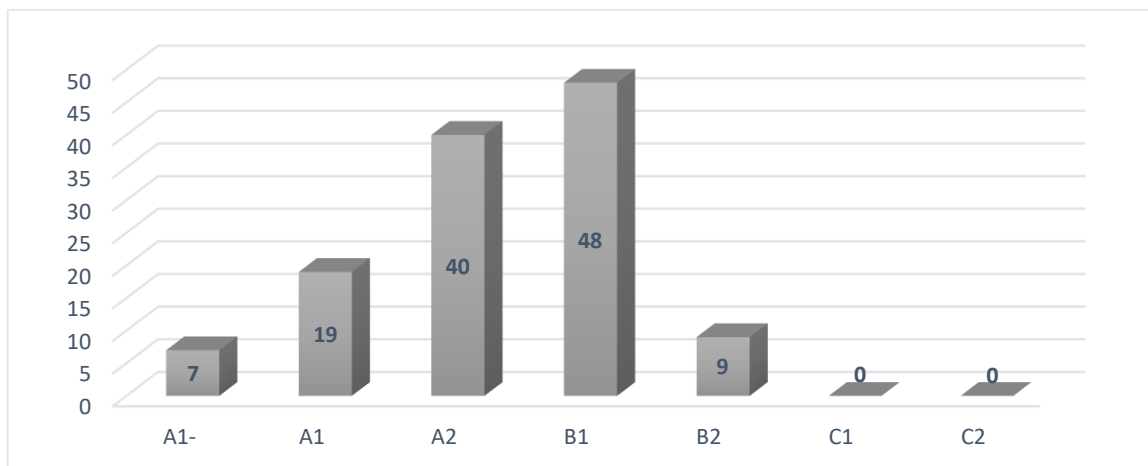


Figure 4: Net Number of Gain and Losses for Vocabulary Proficiency Level

Figure 4 expresses the development in vocabulary proficiency levels. The students who progressed more were the ones who were B1 at the beginning of the mobility. 48 students improved their vocabulary skills from B1 level to upper levels and 40 students improved their skills from A2 level to higher levels respectively. Additionally, while 9 students who initially were at B2 improved their vocabulary competence and 7 students who were initially A1- reached higher levels, there were no students progressing from C1 level. C2 level students had no possibility to move a higher level because of being already the most proficient student. Consequently, 90 students who were not illustrated in this figure remained same and there was no change between their initial and final vocabulary proficiency levels.

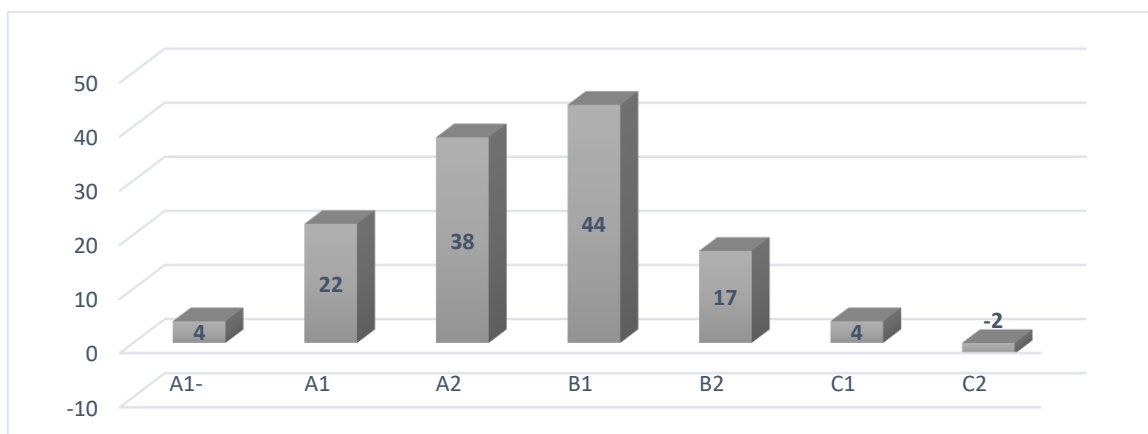


Figure 5: Net Number of Gain and Losses for Reading Proficiency Level

According to Figure 5, while 44 participants who were initially at B1 level, 38 participants who were at A2 level, 22 participants who were at A1 level, 17 participants who were at B2 level and 4 participants who were at A- level improved their reading proficiency levels while 2 participants who were initially at C2 level dropped to lower levels. At that, 86 students who were not illustrated in this figure did not show any progress or regression and there was no change between initial and final reading proficiency levels.

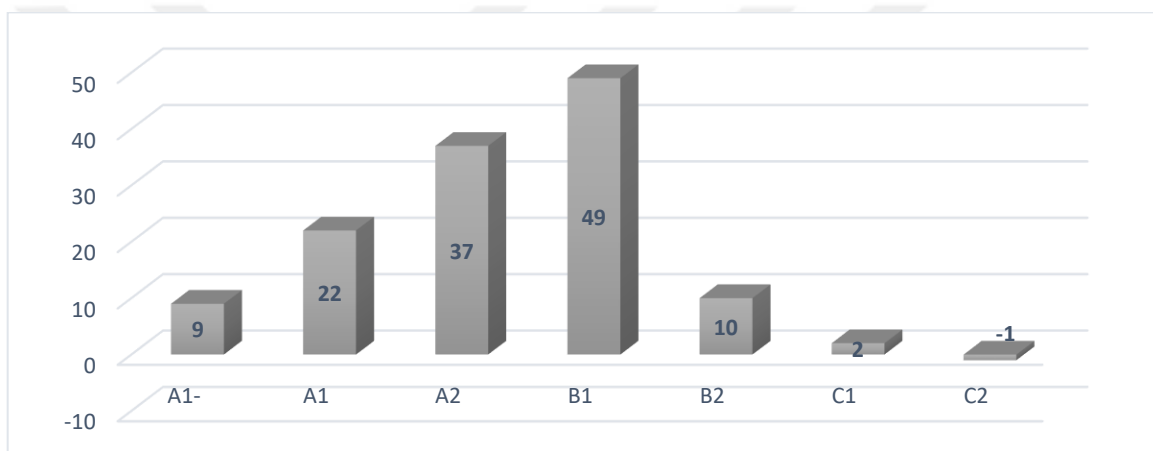


Figure 6: Net Number of Gain and Losses for Listening Proficiency Level

It is illustrated in Figure 6 that 129 students improved their initial listening proficiency levels in total. The most developed students were who had B1 at the beginning of the mobility. 49 students progressed and reached higher levels. 37 students who were at A2, 22 students who were at A1, 10 students who were at B2, 9 students who were at A1- and 2 students who were at C1 levels improved themselves and reached upper levels. However, the level of listening proficiency of one student who was initially C2 regressed. Eventually, 84 students were not illustrated in this figure did not show any alteration and there was no change between initial and final listening proficiency levels.

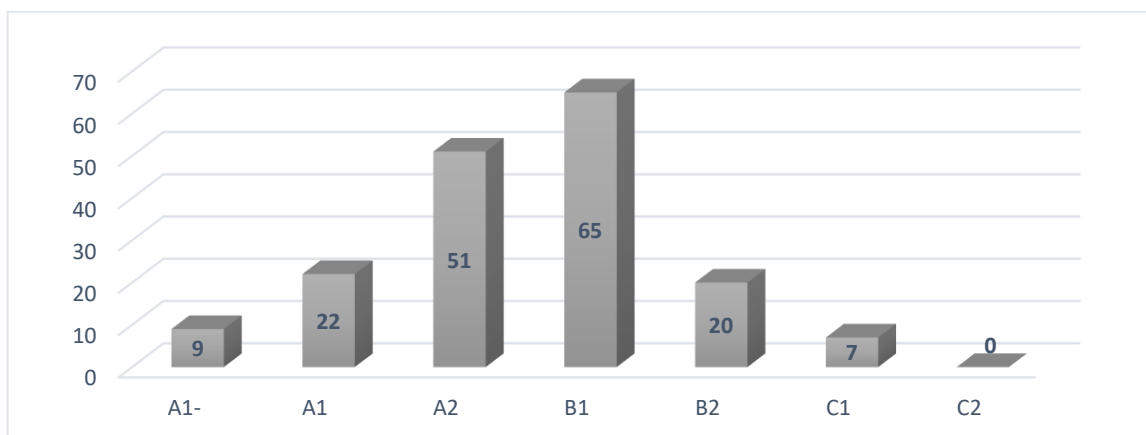


Figure 7: Net Number of Gain and Losses for General OLS Proficiency Level

Ultimately, in Figure 7, 174 students improved their general OLS proficiencies and 39 students remained at the same level as they were before mobility. As for this figure there were no students who dropped by lower levels. 65 students who were at B1 level, 51 students who were at A2 level, 22 students who were at A1 level, 20 students who were at B2 level, 9 students who were at A1- level and 7 students who were at C1 level progressed to higher degrees.

4.1.3. Data Analysis of Challenges and Suggestions

Challenges that students experienced and the suggestions for these challenges are questioned by research questions 4 and 5. Hence, in Table 4.10 the encountered challenges are analyzed and Table 4.11 demonstrates the analysis of suggestions that students produced in order to eliminate them.

Table 4.10 Academic and Linguistic Challenges Encountered

PART III: Challenges	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Not decided		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	<i>f</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>p</i>
Academic Challenges										
19.While preparing learning agreement, the number of English courses were limited.	42	19.7	72	33.8	31	14.6	42	19.7	26	12.2
20.I had to change initial courses in my learning agreement when I arrived at host institution.	24	11.3	44	20.7	19	8.9	89	41.8	37	17.4

21.Academic level of the courses were too high.	23	10.8	83	39.0	35	16.4	51	23.9	21	9.9
22.I had difficulty to adapt to new education system.	42	19.7	88	41.3	34	16.0	38	17.8	11	5.2
23.I had culture shock and it affected my motivation negatively.	109	51.2	75	35.2	12	5.6	14	6.6	2	0.9
24. I believed that teaching staff were not ready enough to help foreign students.	78	36.6	88	41.3	16	7.5	21	9.9	10	4.7
Linguistic Challenges										
25.I had difficulty in following courses because of lecturers using native tongue.	86	40.4	75	35.2	14	6.6	24	11.3	14	6.6
26. I was not active both in class and with my friends because I thought my English was insufficient.	92	43.2	62	29.1	24	11.3	28	13.1	7	3.3
27.I didn't have enough opportunity to practice English outside the school.	76	35.7	77	36.2	15	7.0	28	13.1	16	7.5
28. I had difficulty in examinations because of my poor English.	99	46.5	69	32.4	20	9.4	21	9.9	4	1.9

Note: f = frequency, p = percentage

Table 4.10 illustrates the responses of Erasmus students in terms of academic and linguistic challenges they encountered during the whole process. The most common academic challenge for students was that they had to make changes in their LA (59.2%); however, 32.0% of the students did not have to make any changes. One of the reasons that cause changes in LA is the limited number of English courses provided by host institution. However, the number of students facing this challenge (31.9%) was less than those who did not have such a challenge (53.5%). Moreover, 14.6% of the students did not express certain responses.

In the item 21, while 39.0% of the students disagreed on high level of academic courses and 10.8% of the students strongly disagreed, the number of students who agreed were 23.9% and the ones who strongly agreed were 9.9%.

According to the item 22, more than half of the participants (61.0%) had no difficulty to adopt new education system, 23.0% of the participants accepted having difficulty in attuning to new education system. 16.0% of the participants were undecided.

The number of students who did not have a culture shock and naturally did not lose their motivation is quite high (86.4%). That being the case only 7.5% of the students affected negatively by virtue of culture shock.

According to the item 24, 77.9% of the students thought that teaching staff at host institution was very helpful towards incoming mobility students. The rate of those who thought the reverse was just 14.6%. In addition to that there were students who were undecided (7.5%).

As for the linguistic challenges, it is seen that the number of students who had difficulty in understanding the courses on account of lecturers who prefer to use their native tongue is less than the ones who experienced such a problem. 40.4% of the students strongly disagree and 35.2% disagreed while 11.3% agreed and 6.6% strongly disagreed to the item 25. Meanwhile 6.6% of the students neither agree nor disagree to the stated situation.

Moreover, the initial proficiency level of English did not affect students' performance negatively as stated. For example, 72.3% of them believed they were linguistically competent enough to express themselves and be active during courses. However, 16.4% of them did not trust their English and preferred to stay quiescent during courses. 11.3% of the students were undecided whether to share their ideas or not.

The item 27 is related to students' opportunities to practice English outside the school. 71.9% of the students had opportunity to practice English outside school while 20.6% found no suitable environment to practice English outside the school.

Finally, in item 28 students cited that they were competent enough with their English level in order to have no difficulty during examinations. The number of students who thought the reverse is less with the rate of 11.8%.

Table 4.11 Suggestions to Solve Academic and Linguistic Challenges

PART III: Suggestions	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Not decided		Agree		Strongly Agree	
	<i>f</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>p</i>
Academic Suggestions										
29. I studied different but equally valuable courses.	12	5.6	27	12.7	24	11.3	120	56.3	29	13.6
30. I studied elective courses at host institution and left mandatory courses to be studied at home.	70	32.9	71	33.3	31	14.6	37	17.4	4	1.9
31. I found extra sources and did research to understand the course better.	13	6.1	29	13.6	32	15.0	96	45.1	43	20.2
32. I established a good communication with my lecturers and peers.	5	2.3	4	1.9	11	5.2	103	48.4	90	42.3
33. I spent more time with other Erasmus students and other host country people in order to keep up new environment.	5	2.3	7	3.3	19	8.9	97	45.5	85	39.9
34. I asked for more help from International Relations Office.	30	14.1	73	34.3	44	20.7	44	20.7	22	10.3
Linguistic Suggestions										
35. I took host country's native language course even though I knew it wasn't going to be recognized upon return.	68	31.9	63	29.6	6	2.8	41	19.2	35	16.4
36. I didn't spend time with my Turkish friends and tried to speak English more.	21	9.9	69	32.4	39	18.3	42	19.7	42	19.7
37. I worked in a part time job.	131	61.5	52	24.4	6	2.8	18	8.5	6	2.8
38. I prepared projects, home assignments or made presentations instead of exam.	22	10.3	43	20.2	22	10.3	82	38.5	44	20.7

Note: *f* = frequency, *p* = percentage

Table 4.11 gives information about the suggestions that students found against the challenges they encountered during the whole process of mobility. Depending on the results of the item 29, significant number of students (69.9%) studied different but equal courses abroad as a suggestion while 18.3% of the students did not try it as a suggestion against the challenge they met. Additionally, 11.3% of the students reported their uncertainty.

Moreover, regarding the item 30 similarly as in the item 29, majority of the students didn't need to study elective courses instead of mandatory courses (66.2%). However, 19.3% of them had to study elective courses and left mandatory ones to be studied back in-home institution. Besides 14.6% of them stated their uncertainty.

As for statement 31, 45.1% of the students did extra research and found extra materials to study in order to understand courses better. In addition, 20.2% of them strongly agreed with the statement. However, 15.0% of the students stayed uncertain.

More than half of the students established good communication with their peers and lecturers abroad (48.4% agreed and 42.3% strongly agreed). However, a little amount of them (2.3% strongly disagreed and 1.9% disagreed) were not able to communicate well. Only 5.2% of the students reported their uncertainty.

In order to keep up new environment, 85.4% of the students spent their most of time with other mobility students and local people. Except neutral students (8.9%), the other students with the rate of 5.6% stated their disagreement.

The number of students who needed help from International Relations Office was 20.7%. Meanwhile who strongly need help were 10.3% of the students. However, 48.4% of the students didn't require help from the office while 20.7% of them were undecided to ask for help or not.

So as to suffer less in daily life, 35.6% of the students studied host country's native language even though it wasn't going to be recognized but 31.9% of the students strongly disagreed and 29.6% of them disagreed to do so. Only 2.8% of the students remained uncertain.

Item 36 concerned with not spending time with Turkish friends in order to practice English more, 32.4% of the students disagreed, 9.9% of them strongly disagreed but 39.4% of them stated their agreement.

More than half of the students (61.5%) strongly disagreed to work in a part time job. Besides 24.4% of them reported their disagreement. Nonetheless, a small number of students (8.5% disagreed and 2.8% strongly disagreed) found a job to work at. 18.3% of the students were neutral.

As for the final item number 38, significant number of students (59.2%) prepared projects, assignments and presentations instead of having exams. While 20.2% of them disagreed and 10.3% of them strongly disagreed at having this method, the neutral students were at the percentage of 10.3%.



CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Introduction

Conclusions that are derived from the results of the analysis of the accumulated data and the recommendations for further research underlie this chapter. What are the beliefs of Erasmus EFL students about their linguistic and academic development; do they really improve their language skills after SA; how their previous language proficiency level affects their linguistic progress; what kinds of challenges did they experience during the exchange program and which solutions did they produce to obviate them are the questions that are replied.

5.2. Discussion of the Findings

This study focuses on how Erasmus Program influences the development of students with the instrument of a quantitative analysis. By an online questionnaire, Erasmus EFL students' beliefs about their academic competences covering before-during-after periods and the progress in linguistic competences in addition to relationship between previous and final proficiency levels and finally, experienced challenges and the practical solutions are evaluated in this study. 213 students who took part in the program between 2014 and 2020 in various EU countries contributed to the study.

For the first research question, general beliefs of the students about their academic progress before, during and after mobility are analyzed in compliance with the collected data. The conclusion shows that before leaving their home institutions, majority of the students are not distressed about failing the courses and decreasing their GPAs. To the reverse they are easy at passing the courses successfully. As a matter of fact, they believe that Erasmus Program boosts their professional skills and helps to produce new ideas in their subject fields so their carrier will be affected positively. This optimistic belief is also valid in both during and after mobility. Experiencing different learning and teaching methods, acquiring new knowledge, having access to extra materials and sources in abroad are thought as influential elements for improved grades. Furthermore, most of the students

feel more self-confident, better in communication and more motivated for the academic future after Erasmus mobility. A sense of responsibility develops in students who stay away from their families and living spaces, albeit for a limited time, and the time they spent with other Erasmus students allows them to gain new life experiences and practice their English which are directly related to academic success (DiPerna & Elliott, 1999). At the end of the mobility, students feel more motivated for life and for their postgraduate education. Not only they get more hopeful about their professional future but also they are very likely to find a highly-paid job due to the fact that employers are more well-disposed towards employees who have an abroad experience. The table drawn from the obtained data exhibits that Erasmus students are already self-confident and success-oriented students, from the position of candidacy to the participant. Their already existing capacity greens with their adventure abroad.

One of the other purposes of the study is to investigate the effects of the Erasmus program on students' linguistic competences which are enquired by research question two. Notwithstanding that most of the mobilities occur in non-English-speaking countries, students have to use English in order to survive. Formal environments and real-life non-stop immersion cement language skills of the students. Free OLS courses, practicing English at school and outside, talking to natives as well as other Erasmus peers, day-to-day activities such as shopping, going out to eat, buying tickets for train, bus, etc. amplify language skills, without doubt. To test these linguistic concerns, OLS pre and post-test results are utilized to measure whether Erasmus develops participants' reading and listening comprehensions as well as grammar and vocabulary proficiency levels or not. It is taken for granted that the Erasmus program leads to further development in each linguistic competence of students (Özdemir, 2019; Jacobone, & Moro, 2015; Uzpalienė & Vaiciuniene, 2012). The results procured upon the analysis of data; this general judgement is also fortified in this study.

Further to that, the association between the initial and final language proficiency levels of the participants are inspected based on research question three. As maintained

by the analysis, it is discovered that intermediate students (B1) and elementary students (A2) progressed more than beginner (A1), upper-intermediate (B2) and advanced ones (C1 and C2) in terms of development of grammar, listening and vocabulary competences. This rate of progress differs only in reading proficiency. Because it is found that A1 and B2 level students strengthen their reading skills as much as B1 and A2 level students. In other words, to what extent the initial language proficiency influence final proficiency levels is questioned and it is observed that lower students tend to progress more than initially higher-level students. Because most of the learners of foreign language can feel that after reaching intermediate level, learning can slow down and they stuck in the same level. This situation is described as the intermediate plateau effect which denotes more proficient language learners need to effort more to improve their proficiency. Since the better initial level of English is, the harder a learner strives (Mirzaei & Zoghi, 2017; Wood, 2015).

Therewithal, participants see the program as an opportunity not to be missed and a contributing process thanks to abovementioned values even if they encounter difficulties in this process. The challenges that they encounter mostly arise from problems related to economic and cultural problems and issues about accommodation, foreign language proficiency and recognition (Haworth, 2013). Support of their family, academic staff and friends are the common way outs to solve these problems. In this study, academic and linguistic challenges they experience during the whole process and what they do in order to prevent and dispose of them are focused matters. The data accumulated from the questionnaire exposes that the students mostly experience problems while preparing LA which is actually shouldn't be in the list of the program regulations. Many students have some challenges in terms of the selection, matching and recognition of the courses. Main reasons of such problems can derive from insufficient number of English courses offered by host institution or lack of similar courses that are required to be studied at home institution. In order to disentangle, students mostly prefer to study different but equally valuable courses abroad. Since, the courses do not have to be the equivalents of the courses at home, students should be flexible in the choice of course selection on condition that it

should be related to the studied department (Kosior-Kazberuk & Berkowski, 2016). Studying elective courses in host institution and leave the mandatory ones to be studied back in-home institution is also thought as a solution by the study's sample group but not as common as the previously mentioned solution. Interestingly, culture shock, academic level of the courses, attitudes of academic staff in host institution do not affect the academic motivation of the students negatively which were expected to be influential in a negative way at the beginning of the study.

Over and above this, in terms of linguistic challenges, it is revealed that students do not experience serious problems by virtue of their initial English proficiency levels. They believe that they are competent enough even before the mobility to participate in courses actively, to understand courses easily and express themselves without getting timid during the courses which is actually a prerequisite of the Erasmus Program. Students are expected to be at least B2 level of English or the native language of the visited country before mobility. Nonetheless, both students who are not competent enough before mobility or the ones who are proficient enough to join Erasmus, mostly prefer to make foreign friends and spend less time with Turkish friends for better foreign language practice. Moreover, it is known that most of the Erasmus students are subjected to evaluation by submitting a project or homework instead of exams. The participant group of students of this study is also exposed to such implementations. In such assessments, since students become more independent and less anxious, they can achieve more successful results and graduate with higher grades.

5.3. Conclusion

Since its inception in 1987, the number of participants has been increasing and so the Erasmus Program has assumed the title of flagship program among all the other European exchange programs. The program which draws the attention of the whole world enables cultural, personal, professional, linguistic opportunities while increasing the quality of EU education system. In addition to being a significant factor in development of tourism and internationalization of higher education system, it is clear that it boosts the

personal development of students. Being have to struggle for living in a different country and in a different culture in addition to being far away from home, make students more strong, creative and tolerant.

Although the demands of the beneficiaries may show differences, linguistic concerns are one of the common motivations. Especially in monolingual countries such as Turkey, as it is difficult to exposure to English as a foreign language in natural environment, it seems profoundly logical that EFL students get this opportunity through exchange programs which provide non-stop immersion. Professional progress is the other most cited motivation of the students. Most of them believe that the Erasmus program enables to deepen their knowledge in their fields and they get more self-confident by getting more mature. Bologna Process which makes compatible course patterns which are internationally valid, encourages students in this direction. The results obtained from many studies reveal that Erasmus process beefs up participants' language proficiency and reinforce academic development (Aydın, 2012; Gonzalez, Montanes-Brunet, & Perez-Vazquez et al., 2011; Cardwell, 2019).

Likewise, in this study, the positive effects of the Erasmus program on students are revealed by supporting the findings obtained. Students feel more self-confident, more outgoing and motivated for the future after the Erasmus program that makes a great contribution to their professional skills and so to their career. As a result, they will be less concerned about unemployment problems and they are more motivated to further their education in their fields. All of these lead to the conclusion that students consider themselves more academically competent than they were before Erasmus.

Similar positive impact is observed in development of students' linguistic competence. Since the program provides a huge opportunity to use English in society, students get more competent in vocabulary knowledge. Additionally, being exposed to English not only outside but also at school, force students to do more reading in order to follow courses and be successful in assessments. Due to hearing the target language at any time everywhere and reading a lot develop listening and reading comprehensions. This

non-stop immersion enables participants to develop their awareness in different grammar points. And so, all competences affect each other and progress in chain reaction can be observed during the sojourn.

Further to that, it is generally known that the previous level of language proficiency is related to final proficiency level. In reference to the general understanding, the lower the initial language proficiency is, the higher the progress occurs in foreign language learning (Lapkin et al., 1995, Freed, 1995, Özdemir, 2019). However, such a precise result has not been got through in this study. To the extent of the analysis of OLS before and after evaluation results, it is apparent that the ones improved their level of language proficiency more are particularly B1 level students. A1 and A2 level students show less progress than students at B1. Therefore, it is possible to comment that as having at least B1 level of English is a prerequisite of Erasmus to understand and follow the courses and survive in daily life, these students develop their language skills more because of being able to use it actively. However, the lower students may be timid and discouraged because of insufficient level of English which prevents them to utilize it as a reaction.

Moreover, in accordance with the research question five that targets to determine the challenges students experienced, it is surfaced that preparing LAs before and during the mobility is the most common academic challenge. In order not to have extra problems in the accreditation of the courses taken in host institution, studying different but equal courses or studying elective courses in abroad and leaving the mandatory ones for home are the common way outs that students find. For the challenges related to linguistic matters, many students hesitate to speak English during courses or in a circle of friends because of believing their English is not sufficient to be active. In order to manage these kinds of circumstances, some of them prefer to make foreign friends more instead of spending time with Turkish friends. Further to that, learning the native language of the host country in order to be close with locals and be at ease in daily life can be suggested against the problems related to language.

5.4. Recommendations

Reckon with the results of the research, it can be suggested that particularly department coordinators and heads of the departments should be acquainted with the regulation since most of the challenges are related to preparing LA and recognition of the courses. As the parties responsible for preparing LAs are department coordinators, they should be aware of the commitment to comply with all the arrangements in order not to victimize the students. So as to prevent this troublesome process, before signing bilateral agreements, course catalogues of the host institution should be examined carefully and if it deemed inappropriate, the partnership should not be activated for the sake of students.

Although this study takes linguistic and academic challenges in center, a serious number of students complain also about financial issues (Feyen & Krzaklewska, 2013; Wulz & Rainer, 2015; Erdem-Mete, 2017). Therefore, in addition to the grant sustained by EC, universities can support students financially from their own budget or if possible, International Relations Offices may keep some part of Organizational Support grant for students. Moreover, organizing orientation meetings before sending students abroad and inviting previous Erasmus students to that meetings to inform outgoing students to be about all the possible challenges and possible solutions will be helpful and may prevent students denounce from the Erasmus program.

At long last, when the pandemic is over and students return to their schools, in order to test the academic improvement of the beneficiaries, a quantitative analysis can be done by comparing their transcript of records before and after mobility at the end of the recognition process.

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7. APPENDICES

7.1. Appendix I: Questionnaire in English

PART I: Personal Information For The Questionnaire

Gender	Female / Male
Age during the mobility	19-21 / 22-24 / 25- Over
Academic Level during the mobility	() Short Cycle () First Cycle () Second Cycle () Third Cycle
Department	
Academic year of the attendance to the Erasmus Program	
Host Country	
Teaching Language of the Host Institution	

PART II: OLS Evaluation Results

	A1-	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
1. OLS Grammar test result before mobility							
2. OLS Vocabulary test result before mobility							
3. OLS Reading test result before mobility							
4. OLS Listening test result before mobility							
5. OLS General test result before mobility							
6. OLS Grammar test result after mobility							
7. OLS Vocabulary test result after mobility							
8. OLS Reading test result after mobility							
9. OLS Listening test result after mobility							
10. OLS General test result after mobility							

PART III: Beliefs on EFL Students Before-During-After Mobility

Beliefs on Academic Competence Before Mobility	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not decided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I was worried about failing the course and decreasing the average score (GPA).					
2. I was worried about how to follow courses successfully.					
3. I believed that it would affect my career positively.					
4. I believed to improve my professional skills.					
5. I believed I would be better at developing new ideas with my future profession.					

Beliefs on Academic Competence During Mobility	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not decided	Agree	Strongly Agree
6. I had opportunity to experience different teaching and learning methods.					
7. I had opportunity to acquire different knowledge.					
8. I had to easy access to extra materials and libraries.					
9. Guidance and orientation meetings helped me to adapt to new environment.					

10. I believed that academic quality of the courses was better than home institution.					
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Beliefs on Academic Competence After Mobility	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not decided	Agree	Strongly Agree
11. I have improved my grades.					
12. I believe my self-confidence has developed.					
13. I believe my academic achievement motivation has increased.					
14. I have improved my communication skills with my classmates and teachers.					
15. I have developed my problem-solving competences.					
16. I am more motivated to continue for my post graduate education and academic research.					
17. I believe that the connections I have established abroad thanks to Erasmus will create new job opportunities with a better salary.					
18. My general knowledge about life has been affected positively.					

PART IV: Challenges and Suggestions

Academic and Linguistic Challenges Encountered	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not decided	Agree	Strongly Agree
19. While preparing learning agreement, the number of English courses were limited.					
20. I had to change initial courses in my learning agreement when I arrived at host institution.					
21. Academic level of the courses were too high.					
22. I had difficulty to adapt to new education system.					
23. I had culture shock and it affected my motivation negatively.					
24. I believed that teaching staff were not ready enough to help foreign students.					
25. I had difficulty in following courses because of lecturers using native tongue.					
26. I was not active both in class and with my friends because I thought my English was insufficient.					
27. I didn't have enough opportunity to practice English outside the school.					
28. I had difficulty in examinations because of my poor English.					

Suggestions to Solve Academic and Linguistic Challenges	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not decided	Agree	Strongly Agree
29. I studied different but equally valuable courses.					
30. I studied elective courses at host institution and left mandatory courses to be studied at home.					
31. I found extra sources and did research to understand the course better.					
32. I established a good communication with my lecturers and peers.					

33. I spent more time with other Erasmus students and other host country people in order to keep up new environment.					
34. I asked for more help from International Relations Office.					
35. I took host country's native language course even though I knew it wasn't going to be recognized upon return.					
36. I didn't spend time with my Turkish friends and tried to speak English more.					
37. I worked in a part time job.					
38. I prepared projects, home assignments or made presentations instead of exam.					