

Impacts of the Erasmus Exchange Program on Academicians*

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the perspectives of academic staff regarding the academic and sociocultural effectiveness of Erasmus Teaching Mobility and Staff Training Mobility programs. There were a total of 113 academicians involved in this study that took place at Afyon Kocatepe University. The researchers used a questionnaire including 25-likert-type statements. After the collection of the data, the researchers employed descriptive statistics and Independent-samples t-test in the analysis of the data. The study showed that most of the participants were very happy with the academic and sociocultural benefits of the Erasmus exchange programs. They expressed that the programs enhanced their motivation to share their teaching experience and knowledge with colleagues and students in other countries. They were also delighted with the cultural exchange. Furthermore, gender was a prominent factor in regards to the effectiveness of these programs on the scholars, favoring a female outlook.

Keywords: Erasmus, academic effectiveness, socio-cultural effectiveness, teaching mobility, staff training

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The Erasmus Exchange Program aims to motivate and encourage higher education institutions in Europe to cooperate with each other in an academic environment. This exchange program, which offers both students and academicians financial support, takes its name from the scientist Erasmus (1469-1536) who travelled to many countries in Europe as a student and a lecturer (Ekti, 2013). The program was initially launched on 17th June, 1987 to exchange students between 11 member states, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, France, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and United Kingdom. Since then, Luxembourg in 1988, six European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries in 1992, Liechtenstein in 1994, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia in 1998, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia in 1999, Malta in 2000, Turkey in 2004, Croatia in 2009 participated in the program and increased the number of student mobility and the area of mobility (European Commission, 2013a).

Androulla Vassiliou, the European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism, Youth and Sport, says that in 25 years, the equivalent of one generation, the Erasmus program, has altered the experience of studying in Europe and has made some changes in the lives of about three million students by opening these students' minds (European Union, 2011). It is well-known that Erasmus has been contributing to students' personal and academic development by means of studying in Europe since its first year of implementation.

Currently, students and academic staff of 33 countries benefit from the program and almost all higher education institutions in Europe take part in the program (European Commission, 2013a). Until 2012-2013 (2012-2013 is also included), it is expected to reach three million Erasmus students. If Erasmus student mobility is assumed to be the most important internationalization activity, Erasmus staff mobility program can be assumed to be the second most important (Van Damme, 2001). 300.000 academic staff have benefited from the Erasmus exchange program so far. 32.000 academicians gave lectures and 12.000 staff benefited from Erasmus Staff Training Mobility in the 2010-2011 academic year (European Commission, 2013b). More staff mobility is needed in order to supervise and observe student mobility, host institutions and their curriculums (Reilly, 1993).

In addition to the benefits offered to students, Erasmus offers a number of benefits to academic staff, including the creation of opportunities for cooperation, the spread of and the establishment of cooperation to other areas, the formation of research projects, the attendance of joint conferences and the creation of publications. These established international contacts

contribute to an increase in academic enrichment and an increase in the number of mobility every year (Puigpelat, 1989).

In short, the major aim of the Erasmus program is to help create a “European Higher Education Area”, encourage innovation throughout Europe and motivate students, educators, academicians and administrators to share knowledge and experiences with each other. In addition to exchange actions (Teaching Staff Mobility, Student Mobility and Staff Training Mobility), Erasmus helps universities or higher education institutions work together, or do academic work together through intensive programs, networks and multilateral projects. The EU Commission is responsible for the implementation of the Erasmus program (The EU Commission Education & Training, 2010).

There have been many studies regarding this program since its inception. For instance, Dumciuviene, Duoba & Startiene (2008), Afonso (2008), Mutlu (2010), Bracht et al. (2006), Rață (2013), Çuvaş and Özkılıç (2013) and Fortuijn (2010) are some of them. According to Fortuijn (2010), internationalization in higher education, which is an astonishing and encouraging experience for students and teachers, must be an obligatory feature of universities, which can be applied easily through European Union funds. In the Treaty of Bologna in 1999, the creation of a similar bachelor-master system was committed by the member countries to make educational comparisons and promote both student and staff mobility. International teaching encounters some difficulties in regards to diversity; differences in language and culture can arise. In order to deal with these problems, one should be open-minded, have a willingness to turn diversity into a profitable characteristic, reflect his/her own learning and teaching practices, and be aware of potential problems and profits. Under these circumstances, learning and teaching experiences can be productive and practical.

The study of Bracht et al. (2006), VALERA Project (Value of Erasmus Mobility) for mobile teachers, showed that 58% of the respondents agreed that Erasmus mobility had a positive impact on their professional development. 65% of them stated that they increased their research contacts while 60% of them agreed that they expanded their academic knowledge. 45% of them developed their teaching style in general and 40% of them learned and began to implement new teaching methods (Bracht, Engel, Janson, Over, Schomburg, & Teichler, 2006).

Furthermore, in the VALERA Project, 50% of teachers who participated in Erasmus mobility believe that the teaching experience has increased their international cooperation activities and one third of them have received an increased amount of invitations from

institutions abroad for research projects after their Erasmus teaching periods (Bracht et al., 2006). In Çuvaş and Özkılıç's (2013) study, the teachers surveyed mostly chose the universities where they gave lectures through Erasmus mobility, according to their academic opportunities. The least influential factor in this decision was to develop their foreign language skills. However, the problem which is most encountered is academic incapacities. Likewise, according to the finding of Rață (2013), staff mobility has valuable outcomes since it helps teachers to develop their professional and intercultural skills and generates self-awareness and realization of European identity. Moreover, it advocated multiculturalism by multicultural teaching and learning.

The aim of this study was to examine the perspectives of academic staff regarding the academic and socio-cultural effectiveness of Erasmus Teaching Mobility and Staff Training Mobility programs. The following are the questions that guided the study:

1-What are the motivational factors behind the desire to go abroad and benefit from these programs?

2-What do the scholars think about the given amount of grant money allocated for the activity?

3-How do the scholars assess the hospitality of the institution they visited?

4-How do the scholars assess the program based on their experience in general?

5-Does genders have effects on these views?

Method

The researchers followed and implemented the tenets of the quantitative research method in this study.

Participants

In this study, the researchers followed the "convenience" sampling procedure defined by McMillan (2000), where a group of subjects is selected due to availability. Participants in the study were comprised of academic staff of Afyon Kocatepe University located in the western region of Turkey. There were a total of 113 scholars from different subject areas, including education, engineering, physics, chemistry, mathematics, finance, economics, veterinary, and so forth. 83.2% of the participants were male and 16.8% of them were female.

Moreover, roughly 68% of the scholars benefited from the Teaching Mobility Program and 32% of them benefited from the Staff Training Mobility Program.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researchers developed a questionnaire (see the appendix B) based on the final report form that shows the views of the beneficiaries of the Erasmus exchange programs. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. One of the parts contained the items, such as gender, duration of the program, and so on, and the other part included 25 likert-type statements regarding the views of the participants (beneficiaries of the Erasmus Programs) on the mobility programs including: the desire to have an international experience; the desire to practice English; wanting to know other cultures, and so forth. The Cronbach's Alpha, coefficient of reliability, of the questionnaire was .875.

After the collection of the quantitative data, the researchers used descriptive statistics and Independent Samples t-test in the analysis of the quantitative data. Then, the results of the data were compiled in the result section of the study.

Results

In this section, the researchers present the tables constructed based on the data and give some explanations about the motivational factors affecting the perspectives of the participants who benefited from the Erasmus Exchange programs.

Influential Variables behind the Desire to Go Abroad

Table 1 and table 2 below demonstrate the views of the scholars involved in the study about their visit to a foreign country. The researchers examined the motivational factors of beneficiaries from one of the Erasmus exchange programs. 84% of the participants wanted to have an international experience, almost 80% of them wanted to gain academic experience through teaching or having training in a different culture, 90% of the participants desired to get to know a different culture, and roughly 66% of them wanted to practice English.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics based on the views of the beneficiaries

Motivational Factors-I	Absolutely Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Absolutely Disagree
	%	%	%	%	%
Obtaining international experience	49.6	34.5	12.4	2.7	.9
Gaining academic experience	47.8	31.9	18.6	.9	.9
Desiring to get to know different culture	56.6	33.6	9.7	0	0
Desiring to practice English	33.6	31.9	25.7	8.8	0

Table 2

Descriptive statistics based on the views of the beneficiaries

Motivational Factors-II	Absolutely Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Absolutely Disagree
	%	%	%	%	%
Desiring to promote own culture	26.5	42.5	23.9	5.3	1.8
Desiring to share experience and knowledge	35.4	40.7	23	.9	0
Desiring to gain Self-confidence	31	51.3	9.7	8	0
Desiring to make projects	26.5	25.7	34.5	8.8	4.4
Desiring to write papers/articles	23.9	26.5	33.6	12.4	3.5

Likewise, in table 2 above, 82% of the participants wanted to gain self-confidence, 69% of them wanted to promote their own culture and 76% of them wanted to share experience and knowledge. Based on these percentages, one would say that the participants had great motivational factors to go abroad. However, only 50% of the participants claimed that they had a desire to make projects and write academic papers.

Although sixty- nine percent of the participants stated that they kept in touch with their foreign colleagues, Table 3 shows that 77% of the participants in the current study did not do any academic work together. Only twenty-two percent of the participants did projects, papers and presentations with their colleagues. There should be something done to increase this percentages. For instance, educational conferences can be organized, the academicians can be encouraged to do joint projects and write research papers, and so on. The academicians should be encouraged to attend international weeks/staff training programs in order to share their academic works and/or enlarge their academic contacts instead of just visiting the host University for carrying out the Teaching/Staff Mobility.

Table 3
Frequency table for academic works

Academic Work	%
No work	77.9
Project	11.5
Paper	6.2
Presentation	4.4
Total	100

Given Amount of Grant Funds for the Erasmus Exchange Mobilities

The other item on the questionnaire was about the amount of grant funds given to the beneficiaries for a week. While roughly thirty-six percent of the participants claimed that the given weekly grant for the activity was insufficient, the rest, 64%, stated that the given amount of money was well enough for this kind of educational activity (Table 4). Moreover, there was an item regarding the duration the mobility program. Almost seventy-four percent of the scholars involved in the mobility program stated that one week was adequate. Only 10% of them claimed that one week was inadequate.

Table 4
Frequency table for amount of grant for the activity

Amount of Grant -Adequate	Percent (%)
Absolutely Disagree	3.5
Disagree	11.5
Neither agree nor disagree	21.2
Agree	26.5
Absolutely Agree	37.2

Hospitality of Host Institution

Table 5 below shows the views of the participants about the hospitality of the people at the host university or the institution. Eighty-two percent of the participants reported that the staff attitudes were positive, 85% of them said the teaching staff attitudes were good and 83% of the scholars benefited from the Teaching Staff Mobility found the students attitudes towards them very good.

Table 5
Hospitality of the Host University or Institution

Hospitality	Absolutely Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Absolutely Disagree
	%	%	%	%	%
Staff Attitudes-Good	41.6	40.7	15.9	.9	.9
Teaching Staff Attitudes-Good	47.8	37.2	14.2	.9	0
Student Attitudes-Good	35.1	48.1	16.9	0	0

Overall Assessment of the Erasmus Exchange Mobilities

Table 6 shows the overall assessment of the exchange mobility programs. Almost ninety-three percent of the scholars claimed that they deemed the program useful and fruitful. In particular, 96% of the participants who participated in Staff Training Mobility and 90% of the participants who participated in Teaching Staff Mobility found the mobility activity great and beneficial. They strongly advised those who did not participate in this educational and cultural activity to do so. This finding shows that the Erasmus mobility program corresponds with the expectations of Afyon Kocatepe University. We would say that this is a great achievement for a project.

Table 6
Overall Assessment of the Erasmus Mobility Program

<i>Overall Assessment</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>
Very bad	0
Bad	0
Fair	7.1
Good	54
Very good	38.9

The participants of the study visited the following countries: Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, England, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Spain. The scholars mostly preferred Germany and Poland for Teaching Staff Mobility. Likewise, Germany, Italy, Denmark and Poland respectively were the most visited countries for the Staff Training Mobility. This result lines up with the reports of the LLP in Turkey (2008, 2009).

Gender and Erasmus Exchange Mobilities

Furthermore, this study showed that there were no differences found between those who participated in Staff Training Mobility and those who participated in Teaching Staff Mobility in general [$\bar{x}_{\text{teaching staff mobility}} = 4.30$ and $\bar{x}_{\text{personnel training mobility}} = 4.36$; $t = -.51$, $p = .61 > \alpha = .05$] and with regard to variables, such as motivational factors, grant, hospitality, and academic quality and so on based on the Independent Samples t-test results (table 7) (see the appendix A). On the other hand, gender was a great factor affecting the views of the participants. For instance, there were statistically significant differences found between male and female scholars in reference to obtaining academic experience [$\bar{x}_{\text{male}} = 4.15$ and $\bar{x}_{\text{female}} = 4.74$; $t = -3.74$, $p = .001 < \alpha = .05$], practicing language [$\bar{x}_{\text{male}} = 3.79$ and $\bar{x}_{\text{female}} = 4.47$; $t = -2.89$, $p = .005 < \alpha = .05$], promoting own culture [$\bar{x}_{\text{male}} = 3.94$ and $\bar{x}_{\text{female}} = 4.42$; $t = -2.42$, $p = .017 < \alpha = .05$], and teaching staff attitudes [$\bar{x}_{\text{male}} = 4.26$ and $\bar{x}_{\text{female}} = 4.63$; $t = -2.70$, $p = .01 < \alpha = .05$] favoring female scholars.

Discussion

Motivational Factors With Regard to the Erasmus Exchange Mobilities

The researchers investigated the perspectives of the academicians on the motivational factors regarding the Erasmus exchange mobilities. According to their views, having international experiences, gaining academic experience with teaching, learning about other's cultures and doing language practice were crucial for the participants of this study to visit a different country. The findings of this study support the reports of Turkish National Agency LLP (2008) on these issues. According to the percentages shown in the result section, obtaining an international experience, gaining academic experience, desiring to get to know a different culture, and practicing English were important socio-cultural factors. These reasons are not in conflict with the aim of the exchange programs (The EU Commission Education & Training, 2010).

The study indicated that language practice (66%) was the least prominent variable among others mentioned before. This result supports the finding of Çuvaş and Özkılıç (2013) which states that developing foreign language skills for scholars in the exchange programs was the least influential factor. On the other hand, getting to know other cultures was the most effective factor found in this study. This meets one of the expectations of the Erasmus

exchange programs that highlight the importance of the cultural interactions (The EU Commission Education & Training, 2010).

Another finding of this study was that the participants were reluctant to make projects or write academic papers with their colleagues in the host country. This result is interesting. This finding suggests that the socio-cultural factors had more effect on the scholars than academic-collaborations in the mobility programs. This finding might not line up with the expectations of the Erasmus mobility programs (The EU Commission Education & Training, 2010). In fact, this program expects academic collaborations from the beneficiaries.

Moreover, the finding of this study regarding academic works, such as doing projects and writing academic papers does not support the results of Bracht et al. (2006) who found that fifty-eight percent of the participants were positive with the impact of the mobility program on their professional development. For instance, sixty-five percent of the respondents claimed that they increased their research contacts while 60% of them agreed that they expanded their academic knowledge (Bracht, Engel, Janson, Over, Schomburg, & Teichler, 2006).

Similarly, the findings of this current study support the claim of the Turkish National Agency LLP (2009) that expressed “the great majority of the beneficiaries reported that the program they participated in helped them learn more about themselves, their cultures and foreign cultures as well as improve their self-confidence, foreign language skills and networking capabilities” (Pg.3).

The study also indicated that most of the participants found that one week duration was adequate for these kinds of educational activities and they were satisfied with the given amount of grant. They were also happy with the hospitality of the visited institutions.

In brief, the scholars in this study had great motivational expectations from the Erasmus Mobility programs, such as obtaining international experience and academic achievements, presenting their culture well, learning more about the others’ culture, practicing English, sharing their knowledge and their experiences from the classroom, and doing academic work with their colleagues.

In this study, the participants mostly achieved what they expected from the Erasmus Programs. A great majority of the scholars found the given amount of grant money suitable for a week of visit. They stated that one week duration was good enough for this kind of educational activity. Female scholars were more positive than male scholars with the

outcomes of the programs. The scholars benefited from both Erasmus programs, Teaching Staff Mobility and Training Staff Mobility shared similar views. In general, 93% of the scholars claimed that they deemed their Erasmus mobility programs useful and fruitful. The research outcomes meet the aims of Erasmus Exchange programs and strongly support the continuation of the programs in the next decade.

Gender Issue

This study reported that gender was an important variable influencing the perspectives of the participants. For example, there were statistically significant differences found between male and female scholars with regard to obtaining academic experience, practicing language, promoting own culture, and teaching staff attitudes favoring female scholars. In other words, the female scholars were more positive on the aforementioned questionnaire items than their counterparts. This finding contrasts with the claims of much prior research (Fennema & Hart, 1994; Forgasız, 2005; Fox & Cohn, 1980; Friedman, 1994; Halat, 2006; Smith & Walker, 1988) who claimed that males are better than females or equal in their achievements.

Implications of the Study

One of the results of this study implies that the Erasmus exchange programs have great potential to influence the academicians with regard to having international experience, sharing knowledge, wanting to know others culture and promote their own culture. Therefore, the number of beneficiaries of these programs should be increased. This may help academicians to overcome some stereotypes about other cultures. Moreover, another finding of this study implies that the participants had low motivation level to do academic works with their colleagues in the host country. Therefore, the scholars should be encouraged to make collaborations with their colleagues in academic works, such as writing academic papers, doing projects, and so forth.

Furthermore, the study also showed that in general, a great majority of the participants claimed that Erasmus mobility programs were very useful and fruitful. This implies that these exchange programs as a project have been successfully implemented and fulfilled the expectations of EU. Therefore, the continuation of these programs should be supported.

Limitations

The findings of this current study are limited with the perspectives of participants who were working for Afyon Kocatepe University. The findings may not be generalized and be assessed as overall views of the scholars at other universities in Turkey.

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Appendix A

Table 7

Independent Samples t-test Results for Gender

Items	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t	p
1. Interntional Experience	Male	94	4,24	,851	-1,318	,190
	Female	19	4,53	,841		
2. Akademic Experience	Male	94	4,15	,867	-3,747	,001
	Female	19	4,74	,562		
3. Cultural Experience	Male	94	4,45	,666	-,763	,452
	Female	19	4,58	,692		
4. Practicing Language	Male	94	3,79	,971	-3,372	,002
	Female	19	4,47	,772		
5. Promoting Culture	Male	94	3,77	,932	-3,023	,005
	Female	19	4,37	,761		
6. Sharing Knowledge	Male	94	4,05	,821	-1,370	,182
	Female	19	4,32	,749		
7. Self-Confidence	Male	94	4,02	,904	-1,227	,226
	Female	19	4,21	,535		
8. Doing Project	Male	94	3,57	1,122	-,816	,421
	Female	19	3,79	1,032		
9. Writing Academic Paper	Male	94	3,52	1,124	-,662	,513
	Female	19	3,68	,946		
10. Amount of Grant	Male	94	3,78	1,147	-,906	,374
	Female	19	4,05	1,224		
11. Library Adequacy	Male	94	3,69	,904	-1,186	,246
	Female	19	3,95	,848		
12. Classroom Material Adequacy	Male	94	4,00	,816	-,811	,424
	Female	19	4,16	,765		
13. Internet –Computer Adequacy	Male	94	4,04	,789	-2,347	,025
	Female	19	4,42	,607		
14. Teaching Staff Adequacy	Male	94	4,09	,743	-1,486	,150
	Female	19	4,37	,761		
15. Student Adequacy	Male	94	3,80	,727	-2,292	,030
	Female	19	4,21	,713		
16. Staff Attitude	Male	94	4,15	,842	-1,881	,063
	Female	19	4,53	,513		
17. Teaching Staff Attitude	Male	94	4,26	,775	-2,707	,010
	Female	19	4,63	,496		
18. Student Attitude	Male	94	4,09	,743	-1,226	,231

	Female	19	4,32	,749		
19.Akademic Gain	Male	94	4,32	,626	-2,048	,043
	Female	19	4,63	,496		
20.Thinking to Promote Own Culture	Male	94	3,94	,801	-2,423	,017
	Female	19	4,42	,769		
21.Better to Know others Culture	Male	94	4,01	,664	-2,132	,035
	Female	19	4,37	,684		
22.Thinking Language Development	Male	94	3,64	,853	-,953	,343
	Female	19	3,84	,834		
23.Gain Self-Confidence	Male	94	4,11	,836	-,563	,578
	Female	19	4,21	,713		
24.Willing to Work Outside	Male	94	3,90	,984	,427	,673
	Female	19	3,79	1,084		
GENERAL ASSESSMENT	Male	94	4,28	,612	-1,663	,099
	Female	19	4,53	,513		

Appendix B

Erasmus Program Evaluation and Development Study

- The Erasmus Programme which you participated in Teaching Staff () Staff Training ()
- Sex: Female () Male ()
- The duration of activity (1 week): Very short() Very long() Suitable() Should be longer()
- Have you ever been abroad before Erasmus Programme?
No() Yes() Once() Twice() Three times() Four or more times()
- Are you still in touch with the colleagues you have met during your Erasmus period? Yes() No()
- Have you made an academic project with the colleagues you have met during your Erasmus period?
No() Yes() Project() Article() Paper()

What are the reasons for going abroad? (Scale 1-5: 1-Negative/Poor, 5-Excellent)	5	4	3	2	1
1-The desire to gain experience of being abroad					
2-The desire to gain academic experience					
3-The desire to be on a different cultural environment					
4-The desire to practice foreign language					
5-The desire to promote own culture					
6-The desire to share the knowledge and experience that I have gained with the colleagues					
7-The desire to improve personal self-confidence					
8-The desire to make projects with a foreign colleague					
9-The desire to write an academic article or paper with a foreign colleague					
Amount of Grant Funds:					
10-Given amount of grant funds covered whole expenses.	5	4	3	2	1
Host University/Institution:					
11-Evaluate the efficiency of library at the host university.					
12-Evaluate the efficiency of education materials at the host university					
13-Evaluate the efficiency of computer/technology and internet services	5	4	3	2	1
Academic Quality:					
14-Evaluate the competences of academic staff at the host university.					
15-Evaluate the competences of students at the host university					
Hospitality;					
16-Evaluate the attitudes and behavior of staff towards you at the host university					
17-Evaluate the attitudes and behavior of academic staff towards you at the host university					
18-Evaluate the attitudes and behavior of students towards you at the host university	5	4	3	2	1
General Evaluation of Erasmus Period					

19-I think I have gained academic experience.

20-I think I have promoted my culture in a best way.

21-I think I know the culture of visited country, better.

22-I think I have improved my language skills.

23-I think I have increased my self-confidence.

24- Would you like to work at a university/institution abroad as a result of your Erasmus experience?

25- Evaluate your Erasmus period, in general
