Examining the Role of Erasmus Program in Prejudice Reduction

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Abstract

Erasmus programme may be used as a useful framework to understand prejudice formation, expression of these prejudices and how societies or interest groups can fight to decrease them. Main aim of this research is to provide an in-depth analysis of the role of Erasmus programme in breaking the prejudices from the perspective of the students participating in the programme. Results of this research showed the presence of prejudices among Erasmus student towards Turkey and its residents before the programme started, as a result of different sources of prejudice creation. However, at the end of Erasmus programe results showed that negative attitudes where changed in positive directions. Recommendations about which aspects of Erasmus program could be improved by the case University were provided.

Keywords: Erasmus programme, prejudice, prejudice reduction, Erasmus students, qualitative research

As one of the most popular and most important programmes in the fields of education, training, youth and sport, Erasmus has a major contribution in dealing with European's and world's socio-economic challenges (Erasmus+ Programme Guide, 2016, 7). By promoting common European values, fostering social integration, enhancing intercultural understanding and a sense of belonging to a community, the main goal is to create a more cohesive and inclusive societies free of violent radicalization. The focal point of the Erasmus program are students who participate in this exchange programme, their behaviors, thoughts, interaction between themselves and local students and residents. One of the issue that potentially arises during this programme is the one of prejudices and stereotypes between Erasmus students and local students/residents. Prejudices are generally negative attitude towards members of different group, based solely on the fact that it is part of the other group (Aronson et al., 2013). These are also seen as a state in which one makes decisions about certain people or events in advance, without enough prior knowledge. Prejudices may be related to the individuals, opinions, towards certain community or objects and these are considered as generally negative attitudes. Despite introduction of legal frameworks which promote respect of human rights and different group members' freedom in terms of race, nationality, gender or sexual orientation, humankind is still facing with stereotypes and prejudices on these issues (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1998, 1990). According to Dovidio and Gaertner (1999) the basis of contemporary prejudice expressed in negative feelings and beliefs may be individual process (cognitive, motivational and socialization biases) or intergroup processes (based on conflict between groups or categorization of people into in-groups and out-groups).

Erasmus programme may be considered as a useful framework to understand how prejudices are formed, expressed and how can society or interest groups fight to decrease them. Accordingly, the main aim of this research is to provide an in-depth analysis of the role of Erasmus programme in breaking the prejudices from students' perspective. Guided by this aim, authors conducted a qualitative research as a case study (Yin, 2003) among Erasmus students who attended their winter semester 2015/2016 courses at Akdeniz University Tourism Faculty in Antalya Turkey. In the continuation, literature review of main prejudice studies and Erasmus programme was conducted followed by method and data collection process description. Finally, results were discussed and recommendations about which aspects of Erasmus programme could be improved at case University so that it might be fully regarded as a successful prejudice reduction tool were emphasized.

Literature review

Prejudices are type of attitudes which were given a lot of attention in psychological and sociological research studies (Arendt, 2013, 2016; Brewer 1999; Dovidio & Gaertner, 1998, 1990; Fiske, 2000; Jones, 1997; Nelson, 2002; Pettigrew et al., 1997). One of basic elements of prejudice is stereotype, which can be defined as unfounded belief or opinion about certain members of group which we do not belong to. Considered as a cognitive component of prejudice, stereotypes are generally created in early age and are resistant to change. Particularly, stereotyped attitude about nationality is changing very little during time. Stereotypes are influenced by politics, historic, economic, religious and cultural factors and created by hearsay information. If the stereotypes are accompanied with powerful emotions, prejudice is being created as attitude. Allport (1954) gave the first comprehensive explanation about psychology of prejudice by defining prejudice as wrong or inflexible generalizations based on antipathy. After Allport's view, prejudice is still generally defined as negative attitude towards one group of people or individual members of group as a result of a missing/incorrect judgment process (Fiske 1998; Jones 1997; Nelson 2002). Nowadays, the most common prejudices at macro level are in terms of nationalism, racism, sexism and homophobia. As may be concluded, prejudice and discrimination are phenomenon of central importance for interpersonal social conflict and reconciliation dynamics.

When we look at the topic of prejudice based on dynamics of social groups we may see that the greatest contribution was provided by the research based on framework of social identity theory (Tajfel et al., 1971; Tajfel & Turner 1986). According to Social Identity Theory, which examines the dissociation process of internal and external groups, advocacy of internal group is not just standardized towards members of external groups, but it opens the way towards similar perceptions of characteristics and beliefs of members of internal group. Eventually, people tend to exaggerate the differences between categories while underestimating the differences within their own category (Capozza & Nanni, 1986). In this way both internal and external group are standardizing (homogenize) themselves from the inside and, by increasing the differences, distance between these two groups becomes more evident. In addition, people tend to label and categorize people primarily based on characteristics such as gender, age, skin color, language (Arcuri, 1982). These characteristics can easily become the basis for creation of social groups/identity and based on these demarcation lines between internal-external groups may be easily found. As the level of identification with the inner group increases, the level of prejudice and discrimination towards

external groups is raising (Brewer, 1999). Although both approaches have its limitations, knowledge from both psychoanalysis and social psychology literature should be used to better understand nature of prejudices.

In the academic literature, one may find research on how media has a great influence in affecting stereotype and prejudice's creation and confirmation between different ethnic group members (Huesmann et al., 2012). It is also proven that negative information and impressions in the news coverage may result in negative influence (Mastro, 2009) which was also proven in the research of Schemer (2012) who emphasized that positive news, may reduce the activation of negative stereotypes towards members of immigration groups. Research studies conducted by Dixon and Linz (2000) showed that news that show negative associations towards minorities result in stereotypes which connect minorities with negative issues in society such as criminal, terrorism, chaos etc. Academic literature on this topic also points out that racial bias in news may actually prepare the ground for creation of stereotypical attitudes (Dixon, 2008).

The previous research in the literature has shown that knowledge represents significant variable that can mitigate the effect of news on racial, ethnic and similar attitudes (Pettigrew et al., 1997, Schemer, 2012). Besides knowledge, another concept was emphasized and discussed in the work of Arendt (2013) - negation of information with stereotypic characteristics, which are transmitted through mass media channels.

According to Dual Attitude Model (Wilson et al., 2000) people may hold dual attitudes: explicit attitudes of which we are cognitively aware of and which guide our behavior and an implicit one that we are not aware of but which guide our behavior. Since prejudices are also regarded as attitudes, these may operate on a conscious or unconscious level. After the attitude change people may still hold both explicit and implicit attitudes and how successful this attitude change is will tell us how the new formed attitude is expressed, do people have enough cognitive capacity and motivation to avoid the old negative associations with attitude object and activate the positive ones.

Reducing the prejudices

Traditional method in reducing stereotypes and prejudices may be found in increasing knowledge about members of other groups, while emphasizing that we are mistaken when we refer to prejudices. People's prejudicial attitudes may be changed directly –through mass

media where various persuasion strategies are used, or indirectly - by using techniques where people will be aware of the inconsistency in their attitude and behaviour (Stephan & Stephan, 1984). Besides accurate informing, researchers Webber and Crocker (1983) suggested that repeated contact with the representatives of out-group can be beneficial in chancing stereotypes and prejudice. In social psychological feld, research studies showed that under certain conditions this solid internal-external separation that creates prejudice and discrimination between the two groups can be softened with intergroup contact(Brewer and Miller, 1984; Pettigrew, 1998; Wilder, 1984). What type of contact will lead to stereotype and prejudice reduction was the starting research question of Gordon Allport (1954) who introduced one of the most widely accepted and used theories for prejudice reduction - contact theory. According to Allport (1954) "if prejudice is not deeply rooted in individual's character, the specific type of contact which includes: equal status between majority and minority groups, common goals and it is institutionally supported within the frame of social norm that will lead that contact" (Allport, 1954, p. 281), will be a useful tool in reducing the prejudice between different groups. However, based on the findings of their meta-analysis, Pettigrew and Trop (2006) concluded that these conditions are not essential for prejudice reduction and they recommended a further research on negative factors that prevent intergroup contact from reducing prejudice. This necessity towards development of a more comprehensive intergroup contact theory was noticed in the research of Sherif et al. (1961) who showed that some other conditions must be included into contact theory so it may result in prejudice reduction. As a result of their famous robber's cave experiment, Sherif and his colleagues showed that establishing mutual interdependence between two groups and defining groups' common goal may mitigate negative feeling and hostile situation. These findings were consistent with those of Fiske (2000) who proposed conditions such as: equal status, common goals, and collaboration on certain project and in case of conflict between groups, the presence of authority that has the power to pose the sanction to be influential in prejudice reduction efforts.

The literature on prejudice and stereotype reduction has also shown that friendly and informal atmosphere may be beneficial as well. (Brewer & Miller, 1984; Wilder, 1986). Wilder (1984) also proposed to enable meeting multiple members of the out-group as this will prevent the threat of labeling the whole out-group based on perception and behavior of only one member. He also supported the Allport's recommendation that prejudice will be reduced

if the intergroup contact occurs in a situation where social norms that promote and support equality among groups are present.

In one of the most popular and widely used work of social psychology, Aronson and his colleagues (Aronson et al., 2013) summarized all these findings and proposed a framework of six conditions in which contact theory may lead to prejudice reduction. These conditions are as follows: mutual interdependence, common goal, equal status, friendly, informal setting, contact with multiple members of the out-group present and social norms that promote and support equality among groups. After decades of experimental and survey researches it was proven that contact theory can apply in reducing prejudices between different types of in and out-groups (Pettigrew, 1998).

Erasmus programme

Parallel with the development of Erasmus program, interest for this programme in academic literature was also evident. In the international literature on Erasmus programme, one can find studies dealing with students satisfaction levels and benefits of the Erasmus program for the students who participated in it (Keogh & Roberts, 2009; Sigalas, 2010; Papatsiba, 2005; Teichler & Janson, 2007), reasons of Erasmus students to visit particular country (Rotriguez et.al, 2011), benefits of Erasmus programme in terms of personal development and career preparation for students (Raikou & Karalis, 2010), deterring factors for studying abroad (Netz, 2015). Erasmus programme and its participants were in the focus of many studies which provide detail insight into previous literature on this programme. These can be classified according to: examining the motives for Erasmus students to participate in this exchange program and destination choice (García‑Rodríguez & Jiménez, 2015; Lesjak et al., 2015), impacts of Erasmus programme (Jacobone and Moro, 2015), formation of social networks and interaction patterns among Erasmus students (Van Mol & Michielsen, 2015), emphasize on economic and cultural dimensions of the programme (Cushner & Mahon, 2002).

Due to practical and scientifically proven benefits of Erasmus programme in different aspects of the Erasmus students' and teacher's life experience, the authors of this study considered it as a powerful framework to be used in stereotype and prejudice reduction.

Method

Study group

Research group included Erasmus students that were participating in courses at Akdeniz University Tourism Faculty in fall semester of 2015/2016 (Table 1). In 2003. Akdeniz University started with Erasmus students and academic stuff mobility activities as one of the 15 pilot Universities in Turkey. This University was being given Erasmus Lifelong Learning Award in 2009. and in 2014 it was given an Erasmus Quality Award from the national institutions responsible for the programme. Akdeniz University Tourism Faculty is one of the best faculties in this area, which makes it an attractive option for incoming Erasmus students. One of the advantages of this faculty is that it offers 100% English programmes for both graduate and postgraduate studies.

Table 1
Participants' Profile

Participant no	Gender	Education	Nationality	Length of stay in Antalya
P1	Male	Bachelor	Portugal	one semester
P2	Female	Master	France	one semester
P3	Female	Master	Poland	one semester
P4,5	Female	Bachelor	Finland	one semester
P6	Female	Bachelor	Estonia	one semester
P7,8	Female	Bachelor	Latvia	one year
P9	Female	Bachelor	Belarus	one semester
FG	3 Female	Bachelor Master	Estonia, Poland, Slovakia	one semester

In order to provide in-depth analysis of role of Erasmus programme in breaking the intercultural prejudices qualitative research approach was adopted. In academic research, we often measure peoples' attitudes by simply asking them to evaluate certain statements on the measurement scales. However, since we know that prejudices are unwanted types of associations with certain attitude objects such as nation, race, gender, it cannot be expected that participants would explicitly express their attitude on the prejudice topics. Instead of this unobtrusive (observational) measures through which participant attitudes may be implied based on their behavior and implicit questions regarding Erasmus students' opinion before and after the programme may be used to reach certain types of attitudes. Accordingly, participant observation method, semi structured interviews and focus group meeting with Erasmus students were used to collect data. Since the authors of this paper are at the same time teaching in the courses attended by Erasmus students, the observation method was

considered appropriate to use. During teaching activities researchers started as complete observes of the dynamics and behavior of Erasmus students and, as the courses were going on, researchers were able to analyze and compare perceptions on Antalya and Turkey from both their own and students' perspective and end up as a participant in shaping the Erasmus students' experience. This is consistent by Jorgensen's (1989) participant observation continuum which explains the evolution of researcher from starting as a complete observer to becoming a complete participant. Data collection in this process arise from research's field notes on made observations and own interpretations of the events (Emerson et al., 1995).

In order to achieve consistency in the interviews the question form was created. In the base of semi-structure question form there were questions regarding: their opinion about Turkey and Turks before and after the programme, reasons for this opinion, shortcomings of the programme and recommendations for its improvement. Data collected from interviews and focus group were transcribed and merged with the observation notes. In the next step the qualitative content analyses was conducted on the whole data set. There are certain aspects which need to be considered in order to increase the reliability of the content analysis results (Punch, 2005): detailed description of analysis process, derived categories should be results of discussion and consensus among researchers and use of direct quotations. At the beginning of the content analysis coding scheme with categories was defined and named by one Serbian and two Turkish researchers independently after going through transcripts couple of times. In the next step, researchers came together to compare, discuss and get consensus about common category scheme.

Results

Opinions of Erasmus students about Turkey and Antalya before coming to Turkey and after the participation at the programme were presented in Table 2. All the participants pointed out that they had certain prejudices about Turkey and Antalya before their arrival. These prejudices were divided in two categories: culture and Antalya.

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Table 2
Categorization of attitudes of Erasmus students about Turkey before and after the programme

PREJUDICES OF ERASMUS STUDENTS		OPINIONS AFTER ERASMUS PROGRAM	
CATEGORY	**SUB-CATEGORY**	**CATEGORY**	**SUB-CATEGORY**
CULTURE	Muslim Very religious Uncivilized Terrorist Conservative Arab Middle Eastern Barbarian Non civilized Without education Ignorant Aggressive Dirty Covered Women Inequality between men and women Rude Unsympathetic Dark- skinned Noisy Hairy	**CULTURE**	Brave Patriotic Relaxing Emotional Passionate Respectful Helpful Hospitable Curious Kind Like us Comfortable Family bonds Not punctual
ANTALYA	Touristic city Sea Natural Beauties Insecure Dangerous Risky	**ANTALYA**	Bright Safe Right Size Hotel Natural beauties Touristic city Breakfast culture Cheap Traffic problem Bad city planning

For a more systematic presentation these categories and sub-categories were grouped under following themes: prejudices towards Turkish people, source of prejudice, opinions after Erasmus programme and shortcomings of the programme.

Prejudices towards Turkish people

Some of the highlighted sub-categories under culture were religious values and associations. The first associations about Turkey among Erasmus students are Muslims and very religious behavior and attitudes. These were one of the most commonly used concepts during the interview:

"For Polish people, when you go to a Muslim country, they think that women are in a lower position than men and that they are treated worse. This was the case with Turkey as well." – P3

"In Estonia religion is not so important, but when they think about Turkey, they think it is a religious country."- FG

On the question about what first comes to one's mind when talking about Turkish people some of the physical and behavioral characteristics such as *dark-skinned, temperament, aggressive, loud* and similar are noticeable. Some answers went so far, that according to physical appearance the link with terrorists was established:

"Yes at first place they seemed like terrorist, because of their appearance, because in Portugal we do not see so many people like Turks."- P1

"They (Turks) speak so loud and you don't understand them. When you are on open public space it can be strange."- P2

It was often reported that Turkish people were perceived as Arabic people, and this automatically has a negative connotation. In order to better illustrate this association, the interpretation of Polish participants about Polish people's opinion about Turks can be a good example. She was reporting one of her conversation with her cousin (who was Polish) about her Erasmus friend (who was Turkish) where our participant defended her friends with following words "Yes, *she is a Muslim and she is not covered, she is friendly, I can spend time with her, I can live with her, I can travel with her..."*However these arguments were not enough to convince her cousin as "*…they are calling that Turkish people are Arabic people… This is a problem for Polish people they are too scared to start even a conversation with them…*" P3

By putting an equity mark between Turkish and Arabic people, automatically the prejudices about Islam, fanaticism, conservatives etc were recalled. There is also an argumentation of prejudice related to immigration in countries such as France where two or three generations of immigrants are living. Accordingly, participant from France reported the previous knowledge about Turkish people in their country as follows:

"In France we have a lot of Turkish people and we have some problem with the way of immigration… When I decided to come here a lot of people told me why you go there it can be difficult in terms of religion, situation with Syria and everything.. French Turkish people can be bad, but all in way of immigration…" - P2

Finally it may be concluded that connotations about Turks were dealing with negative attributes such as inconsiderate, rude, fanatic, ignorant, aggressive, nasty.

"They (Finish people) didn't think that here can be like universities and people actually studying… not like- normal life…"- P4

"Turkish men don't respect women so much and all women are covered..." – P7

Before coming to Antalya, participants had the perception of it as touristic city with natural beauties, representing very popular tourism destination among tourists in their country. Prejudices that were classified under Antalya category were danger, risk and insecurity.

Source of prejudice

When asked how their negative prejudices were formed, participants stated that media had a great influence on forming these prejudices, emphasizing negative news about Turkey in visual, written and social media

"Young people (Turks) do bad things, they are always on the street and there are like "I don't like France", not everyone but some of them … and on TV you see a lot of images like this."- P2

"Opinion I had from TV or from articles I usually read, there were no such good things about Turks - they are like different. Different than European people and therefore I don't know I connected Turkish all time with Arabic or so, like many others."- FG

From the previously illustrated prejudices it may be noticed that participants had the pre-opinions about Turks living in a closed society where there was lack of individual

contacts and where life style and behavior may contribute to creation of prejudices. When Erasmus students were describing their opinion prior to arrival to Antalya and Turkey, they reported that they faced a lot of questions from their friends, families even the teachers about reasons for coming to Turkey. Participants reported the questioning about going to Turkey as follows:

"There were more negative than positive opinions, because everyone was like "Ouuuh you are going to Turkey". I was like "Why not??" "Why you didn't choose the better country than Turkey" – P4

"My friends were very surprised and always asked "Why Turkey? Why Antalya?". They couldn't understand why I choose Antalya and they were saying "Oh, come on, why there, there are more interesting places, more safe places to go for Erasmus, why Turkey?"- P3

This constant questioning of their decision to come to Turkey was also a potential source of prejudices and reflection on emphasis of boundaries between European people and Turkish people.

Opinions after Erasmus programme

Based on the answers after participating in Erasmus programme it can be clearly stated that prejudices were changed.

"I expected even to be more conservative... but when I am walking down the street and I don't feel so much besides the prayer calling from the mosque and so on and women who wear scars it is not so seeable or I guess also in Antalya where tourism and everything affects it"- P7

As they were able to interact with locals during their trips around Turkey and Turkish students while attending courses at University, they find them very respectful, helpful and hospitable. In addition, they found that Turkish students were very interested in Erasmus students and they wanted to find out more about their country, culture, customs etc.

"Our opinion is different now because we saw how they live and treating us like their guests, so it's more positive than before. How helpful they are, like even if they don't speak English they try to communicate with you and help you"- P4

"I think Turkish students are very kind and hospitable and friendly, curious maybe this curiosity they really want to know you and they are really interested in foreign people and it is good I think." – P5

Some of the participants were stressing the sense of relaxation in Turkey, which was quite different than their usual routine and which positively affected them:

"I think here I am not stressing about anything. In Finland, I am always stressed about something, but here everything is relaxing." – P4

"Turkish people are always late, like for the first time we came we were very angry, but now like 15 minutes late- oh it's ok. You learn not to worry about small things." - P6

It is interesting to mention that the perception of Turkish people of having a great family values and love towards their country is noticed by four participants who spent one year in Antalya and had more opportunity to interact with Turkish people and culture:

"They love their own country and they are not afraid to show it. In Finland we, of course, love it but there is like... normally we don't show our Finish flags or anything but there are some really Finish people and they are more like nationalist. Here I don't think they are nationalists they just love their country" – P4

"We went to our friends and it was interesting because they didn't speak English just father a little bit... After few minutes he said to us "Is your family coming here to Antalya for holidays? If they are coming they can stay with us" – P6

After participation in the programme it can be concluded that prejudices towards Antalya completely disappeared. They emphasized that Antalya is a very safe, sunny and bright city with numerous hotels and great natural and historical beauties.

"In Portugal always news says that Turkey is a dangerous place and it is not like that. Now I've changed my opinion and I think it is safer than Portugal, here in Antalya. Beaches, sun, always sun, it is neither a small nor big, I think it is a right size of the city." - P1

"You feel safe, the behaviour of people is really nice, they try to help you don't feel uncomfortable because of religion." - P2

However Erasmus students do not like absolutely everything about Antalya. It seems they have expected to see some better architectural solutions when it comes to buildings which will be consistent with the popularity and beauty of the whole city as a great touristic destination. Also traffic regulations and patterns are a great surprise for the Erasmus students

as they have noticed that drivers are driving too fast, sometimes breaking traffic rules, public buses sometimes stop away from the bus stop, etc. Also they find buses as an interesting place for interaction with Turkish locals, as they have mentioned that a lot of spontaneous conversation started during one of their everyday drives to/from University.

Shortcomings of the Erasmus programme

Although there has been an evident change in attitude in terms of prejudice towards Turkey, Antalya and Turkish people, there are still certain shortcomings of the programme that could be improved. During interviews and focus group meeting, Erasmus students were expressing their willingness to cooperate more with Turkish students which may be concluded from the following quotations:

"I would like to have more classes and joint projects with them (Turkish students), cause I know their face but not their names. And we speak about basic stuff actually, we never actually speak like we would do if we were on a project together…"– P3

Participants of this research also emphasized the necessity to be in the same environment with the Turkish students as one of the main predispositions for increased cooperation. They found the classrooms and joint project as the encouraging starting points for the better mutual understanding and goal fulfillment. We may read these based on the following expressions:

"If you want to get into to culture you have to speak with locals. To be in class with them is the best way to speak about that." P2

"There should be more interaction between ERASMUS and Turkish students and we can learn something from each other, since we have different experiences."-P5

When it comes to professional qualities of teachers, Erasmus students noticed that there is almost no difference between teaching stuff in Turkey and Europe in terms of teaching quality. Positive impression about teachers can also be noticed when it comes to their relation with Erasmus students. They reported that teachers were always there to help them with advice, with some administrative issue related to courses and faculty and that they always treated them good. However, some of the participants pointed out that teachers could have more active role in managing the working environment and relations between Erasmus and Turkish students. These can be seen from the following example:

"I think that teachers can do more for the students to work with each other more. When I think about it now, I think that English teacher for example, could have used us for presentation or I don't know that we could do something in the class not to just take the exams… we could do something together with them (Turkish students)."- P6

Erasmus students also reported stereotypes other students had about them:

"Everyone say "you are ERASMUS so it does not matter if you are in school or not". So everyone "say it is easy for us; why you are going to classes you don't have to be in school" - students say. They give us that picture that we don't have to come to school that we can do whatever we want, have fun.."-P3

This was consistent with the views of other Erasmus students who also reported that it is common stereotype about them having easier studying condition and treatment. This automatically point out that Erasmus and Turkish students are not treated equally which is a good condition for creation of two different groups among students. These groups are evident in everyday school life at faculty: during the lessons where Erasmus and Turkish students are sitting separately, due to insufficient knowledge of English language not so many Turkish people are communicating with Erasmus, Erasmus programme responsible offices organize events for Erasmus students without presence of Turkish students etc. These can be read from the following:

"Because when you are in Erasmus it is a big family and language was a main barrier. We kept together with Erasmus students... they tried to speak to us, but we see them only once a week so it is not enough.." - P2

"We didn't had any event together with Turkish students. We were always ERASMUS together." – P4

Intentionally or not, directly or indirectly, two different students groups were created, they continue social interaction mainly with the members of their inner group without intention to communicate and interact with Turkish students. Consequentially, creation of these groups may be a potential barrier in prejudice reduction process.

Discussion

This study aimed to Based on the results of this research conducted at the case University, we may conclude that prior to start of the programme, Erasmus students had negative attitudes towards Turkish people with prejudicial character: negative decisions about

Turkish people were given in advance without prior knowledge (Fiske 1998; Jones 1997; Nelson 2002). Results of this research show similarity with some of the basic findings of the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) that examines dissociation process between internal and external group members, which is based on strong advocacy of internal group emphasizing positive perceptions of the members of inner while at the same time opposite perception of out-group members occurs. While this boundary occurs one of the fundamental factors in this dynamic such as categorization comes up. Indeed, it is quite common to see the groups of Erasmus students sitting separately from Turkish students. As a result even during the breaks and on every occasion during the lesson Erasmus students are interacting among themselves. As a result of the observation it is the same situation with Turkish students, who continue their lesson interaction with their inner group members as if they were not in the same class with Erasmus students.

In his work, Arcuri (1982) claimed that people tend to label and categorize people based on gender, age, skin color, etc. Based on the data obtained from research participants, it can be noticed that prior to arrival to Turkey, Erasmus students had the tendency to label Turkish people in the similar pattern such as dark skinned, covered women and similar. These characteristics can automatically trigger the stereotypes recall and prejudice activation such as Turkish people = Arabic people = Muslims = terrorists. No matter, how simple this equation may look like in society we know nowadays, results of this research pointed out that more than 30 years after the Arcuri's work, some of his statements are still valid as people still make compulsory judgments based on use of mental shortcuts proposed by Kahneman, Slovic and Tversky (1984).

How big the differences between the members of internal and external groups and how strong are the bonds between members of inner group is being represented by Erasmus students statements about how people from their own countries were keep questioning their decision to come to Turkey for Erasmus in a first place. The question that rises in their head probably was "Why crossing the border of known cultures and customs in countries such as Finland, Latvia, Estonia, France –in one word European countries and going to other, unknown regions where there are "Turks", "Muslims", "Middle Eastern society". In condition of constant questioning and drawings of invisible, but strong boundaries between internal and external groups, the level of identification with members of inner group increases while creating negative prejudices towards members of outer group (Brewer, 1999).

The source of prejudices towards Turkish people is considered to be found in the lack of knowledge about the Turkey on the whole and its people as well as incomplete information transmitted through visual, written and social media. Role of media in attitude formation reported from the perspective of Erasmus students is consistent with the findings from Mastro (2009) and Schemer (2012) that negative information in media may have influence on formation of negative attitudes. Participant from France put forward the problem of immigration in her country and proposed negative associations with Turkish people based on the picture of the immigration in their national news. This problem was also examined and proved by the work of Dixon and Linz (2000).

When they were talking about shortcoming of the programme Erasmus students mentioned the problem of creation of Erasmus and Turkish students group with little interaction between each other. Without proper communication and cooperation between Erasmus and Turkish students there is a danger of difference exaggeration as mentioned by Capozza and Nanni (1986). Due to the language barrier, Turkish students are constantly restricting themselves in their efforts to communicate with Erasmus students. Accordingly, Erasmus students do not have enough opportunity to communicate with Turkish students which results in more cohesion with other members of Erasmus community found at University. This is where aspects of Alport's (1954) contact theory may be used in order to prevent group formation patterns and help in prejudice reduction efforts. The results of this research showed that some of the six conditions are missing in the academic at case University deficiencies of academic aspects of Erasmus programme are representing the lack of some of the Aronson's six conditions (Aronson et al. 2013) that should be provided in prejudice reduction efforts.

Conclusion

Main goal of this research was to provide an in-depth analysis of the role of Erasmus programme in prejudice reduction from the perspective of international students who participated in programme. Accordingly the main source of knowledge for this research was derived from social psychological literature where prejudice, its nature, components, sources and reduction tools have been one of the most popular topics for decades. Authors of this research found Erasmus program to be useful framework to understand prejudice dynamics among students who participate in this programme. Education is considered as vital component in prejudice reduction, therefore it is in a certain way obligation of the academic

institutions that participate in Erasmus programe to constantly work on improving it so that it can fulfill the mission of constituting and preserving universal human rights and values.

Results of this research clearly show the presence of stereotypes and prejudices towards Turkey and Turkish people among Erasmus students before programme started. According to the findings of this research highlighted prejudices of Turkish people were in terms of religion and religious association, physical appearance and behavioral assumptions according to these associations. The main source of these prejudices lies in bad publicity Turkey as a country has in foreign written, visual and online social media. Incomplete information are driving forces in shaping the negative pre-opinions or stereotypes towards Turkish people which ends up in prejudice formation.

However, findings of this paper show that Erasmus program is useful framework for fighting the prejudice, as Erasmus students reported a change in opinion towards Turkey and Turkish people. This attitude change is not based on the second hand informing and impressions of others, but on experiencing the Turkey's culture and everyday life in its real settings. During a period of six months or one year Erasmus students are living and studying in Turkey, interacting with locals, slowly immersing and learning about the people, culture and customs of this country. This is what makes Erasmus students a valuable first hand source of information which is widely used in academic research and the researchers considered it as an important segment to be used in prejudice reduction research. Based on the results of the current study it can be concluded that participation in Erasmus programme may result in decrease of prejudices and stereotypes leaving participants with positive impressions about Turkey and its people. However, results emphasized certain aspects of the Erasmus program that could be improved by the case University and responsible institutions. Based on these findings, authors derived couple of valuable recommendations for the case University and faculty authorities in order to create a solid basis for prejudice reductive environment in academic settings.

Increase knowledge: All parties included in the Erasmus programme have the obligation to constantly improve the correct information-flow-network among the participants of this program. It is also the obligation to keep Erasmus as an open-minded programme, resistant to false information, generalized and simplified information and association towards critical social issues such as ethnicity, race, gender etc.

Emphasis on teachers' role: In the Erasmus programme teachers are perceived to be *facilitators* – as they are there to guide Erasmus students through their courses and make them feel accepted*,* and *mediators* – in terms of communication between coordinators from different countries as well the common source of information and interaction between them (Erasmus students) and Turkish students. Teachers should be aware that they are also an important participant in the Erasmus programme as they are expected to manage the academic process which will equally include both groups of students, nurturing sense of mutual interdependence and common goals.

More emphasize on collaborative projects between Erasmus and Turkish student: Although it is one of the main goal of Erasmus programe itself, it is notable that in practice actual cooperation between Erasmus and local students is not always at the desired level. This is partly because of the stereotypes local students towards Erasmus students as "guests" who do not have to spend so much time and effort in school during the exchange period. This is also the responsibility of the teachers to prevent further confirmation of these stereotypes about Erasmus students and establish a new working environment where Erasmus and Turkish students will work together on mutual benefits.

Increasing the interaction inside and outside the classroom; in order to succeed in prejudice reduction efforts, triggering interaction among Erasmus and Turkish students outside the classroom is vital. Informal and friendly setting, where students will exchange their ideas, opinions and cultures and make new and lasting friendship, will completely overcome prejudice and stereotypes issues and work directly towards fulfillment of the Erasmus programme goals. Therefore encouraging the exchanging culture among students through joint projects in the classroom, interesting trips and tours, social projects and similar will be very beneficial in fighting the prejudices.

Use the University power in positive direction: Erasmus programme is already incorporated into regular activities of all participating Universities and institutions and regulated by responsible authorities and agreements. Although responsibilities of both students and teachers are already established according to the University rules, authors believe it would be beneficial if some of the above mentioned recommendations are discussed at the higher authority levels at Universities. The level of teachers' independence in making decisions, organization of courses' curriculum that will encourage more cooperation among international and local students in order to fulfill educational goal, cultural exchange that will enhance mutual understandings and positive relations among students inside and outside

University should all be shaped into a social norm. Power of this social norm introduced by University authorities will assist in creating permanent and accurate picture about the visited country that is to be further transmitted in the origin country of Erasmus students.

Limitations and recommendation

Main limitation of this study is that it was aimed at examining how Erasmus programme may serve as a prejudice reduction tool only for a case University, thus results cannot be generalized. Different Erasmus programme member countries may have different prejudice issue and areas that should be improved in order for this education programme to use its full prejudice reduction potential. However, the significance of this research lies in the fact that it was one of the first to look at importance of Erasmus programme from a wider social psychological perspective which can be a useful basis to examine different aspects and social dynamics which are in the scope of the programme. It would be useful for the future research to check whether these new, changed and positive attitudes among Erasmus students toward local country and people stay persistent upon the return to home country and what can be done to strengthen them.

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