The Impacts of Study Abroad Opportunities on International Students

Seza Zerman

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.rit.edu/theses

Recommended Citation
Rochester Institute of Technology

The Impacts of Study Abroad Opportunities on International Students

by

Seza Zerman

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Hospitality and Tourism Management

Thesis Advisor: Rick Lagiewski

College of Applied Science and Technology

School of International Hospitality and Service Innovation

Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management

Rochester Institute of Technology

Rochester, NY

June 2014
Abstract

The emerging global structure requires interaction between societies and the international flow of knowledge. Exchange of students and study abroad programs are components of this internationalization process. The Erasmus program, the most common study abroad program in Turkey, has a great impact on the exchange of cultures and academic knowledge. This study will reveal different kinds of Erasmus experiences, the cultural and academic impacts of the program, how the program changes the expectation of participants, and how participants experience the return home after their study abroad program.

Data were collected via a qualitative method—a semi-structured interview, as the objective of the study is to gather personal feelings and ideas. Nine former Erasmus students from Anadolu University Tourism Department, Turkey, were interviewed via Skype or phone call between April 20 and May 9, 2014.

The data from the interviews were grouped and analyzed under the study objectives subgroups based on the literature and themes that the students mentioned during the interviews.

The study reveals that tourism major students consider study abroad programs and international experiences as vital for their major. According to participants, after the Erasmus program they became more open-minded and tolerant, and they state these characteristics are important for the tourism field to accommodate people from diverse backgrounds. For that reason students believe that institutions should provide more international opportunities to exchange cultures and experience different education and learning styles.
In addition, although academic expectations are not the drivers that make students decide to participate in the program, during the program they recognize some differences between home and host institutions in terms of learning environments and different teaching methods. These differences make students expect more from their home institutions and motivate them to continue their education or career abroad.

Additionally, as the program provides an opportunity to experience different cultures and lifestyles, returning from such an experience is seen as challenging by students as Turkey and Europe have different lifestyles in terms of social life, recreational activities, and way of life. Although the students are not naming this problematic process as a reverse culture shock, their desire to go back addresses one of reverse culture shock’s indicators as mentioned in the study of Cohen (2003). Therefore, the adjustment of the returnees should be considered more in depth.

The study would be beneficial for students who would like to join study abroad programs or other kinds of internationalization activities such as international field trips or other exchange programs. It also could be used by the professors, institutions, and international offices of the universities to accommodate the students, as their expectations and satisfaction levels change after abroad experiences and their returning process has some difficulties to consider.

Key words: internationalization, study abroad, Erasmus, re-entry, academic impacts of study abroad, cultural impacts of study abroad
To my mother Maksude Zerman and

my father Mehmet Zerman
Acknowledgements

This study would not have been possible without the valuable contributions of several individuals.

First of all, I would like to express my great appreciation to my advisor, Rick Lagiewski, for his valuable and constructive suggestions, patient guidance, and useful critiques during the development of this thesis. His respectful and patient manner under any conditions made this study easier to accomplish.

Special thanks are extended to the nine participants of the study for their valuable input and their valuable time. Without their insightful contribution, I would not be able to finish this study.

I would also like to convey thanks to Dr. Medet Yolal and Kazım Demirer from Anadolu University for their kind support.

I would like to thank Dr. Muhammet Kesgin for his contributions to the study with his valuable comments.

I also would like to thank Dr. Erkan Yüksel, who broadened my horizon with his valuable ideas and triggered my desire to study abroad, which began in Portugal in 2008 and continues in the US. His academic honesty and generosity for sharing his wisdom will be an example for me throughout my academic career.

Special thanks to Dr. Ferat Şahin and Selhan Garip Şahin for their warm hospitality in Rochester. Thanks to them, Rochester and the US were not abroad anymore; instead, it was my second home.
I would like to offer my special thanks to my friends in the US, Abdulaziz F. Eid, Eyüp Çınar, Neşe Yılmaz, and Onur Özçalık. They were with me through all the difficulties and the most insufferable days during these two years. Without their support and valuable time dedicated to motivate me for my degree and thesis, everything would have been more difficult.

On the very first day of this journey, Ayten Doğan Baytaroğlu was one of the very first people who believed in me and provided unconditional support. Therefore, this study is also a result of her valuable contribution.

The hidden hero of this thesis, as well as many of my other achievements, is my dear brother, Erel Zerman. The sincerest thanks goes to him not only for being the best example in my life but also for encouraging and motivating me throughout the process. Without him in my life, I would definitely not be the same person I am today.

Last but not least, the greatest thanks goes to my parents, my mother Maksude Zerman and my father Mehmet Zerman, for standing with me through this tough process and walking with me even from thousands of miles away throughout my studying abroad journey. Their infinite love and unconditional support gave me the power to follow my dreams and make them come true. You are the magic power of my life. I appreciate every single thing that you have sacrificed for me to follow my dreams.
# Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... ii  
Dedication ....................................................................................................................................... iv  
Acknowledgements ......................................................................................................................... v  
Table of Contents ........................................................................................................................... vii 
List of Tables ..................................................................................................................................... x  
List of Figures ................................................................................................................................... xi  
Chapter 1: Introduction ..................................................................................................................... 1  
  1.1 Background ............................................................................................................................... 1  
   1.1.1 Academic impacts of study abroad ......................................................................................... 4  
  1.2 Purpose of the Study .................................................................................................................. 6  
  1.3 Significance of the Study .......................................................................................................... 7  
  1.4 Terms and Definitions ............................................................................................................. 8  
Chapter 2: Literature Review .......................................................................................................... 10  
  2.1 Internationalization ................................................................................................................ 10  
  2.2 Internationalization of Tourism Education ............................................................................. 11  
  2.3 Consequences of Internationalization of Higher Education ................................................. 12  
  2.4 Study Abroad ........................................................................................................................ 13  
  2.5 Erasmus Program ................................................................................................................... 15  
  2.6 Reasons to Go and Expectations of Students ......................................................................... 17  
  2.7 Impacts of Study Abroad ....................................................................................................... 20  
  2.8 Returning From Study Abroad and Re-entry ....................................................................... 22
Chapter 3: Methodology .................................................................................................................. 28
  3.1 Introduction of Method ............................................................................................................. 28
  3.2 Data Collection Process .......................................................................................................... 29
  3.3 Participants - Description of the Sample ................................................................................ 33
  3.4 Instruments ............................................................................................................................... 33
    3.4.1 Survey ................................................................................................................................ 33
    3.4.2 Interview .............................................................................................................................. 34
  3.5 Data Analysis ............................................................................................................................. 35

Chapter 4: Findings and Result Analysis ......................................................................................... 37
  4.1 Findings ..................................................................................................................................... 37
  4.2 Analysis ....................................................................................................................................... 42
    4.2.1 Different types of study abroad experiences ...................................................................... 48
    4.2.2 Changes in learning expectations ....................................................................................... 52
    4.2.3 Effects of study abroad on their culture .............................................................................. 58
    4.2.4 Impact on the classroom ..................................................................................................... 61
    4.2.5 Re-entry and adjustment of students ................................................................................... 64

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations ............................................................................... 69
  5.1 Conclusion ................................................................................................................................. 69
  5.2 Recommendations for future studies ...................................................................................... 71

References ........................................................................................................................................ 74

Appendix A ........................................................................................................................................ 85
Appendix B ........................................................................................................................................ 86
Appendix C ........................................................................................................................................ 87
List of Tables

Table 1: Erasmus exchange goals .................................................................................................................................................. 18

Table 2: Personal problem subscale responses ............................................................................................................................. 24
List of Figures

Figure 1: Dimensions of study abroad ................................................................. 15
Figure 2: Classification of Erasmus program students ............................................. 19
Figure 3: Number of outgoing students in 2011-2012 academic year ....................... 30
Figure 4: Funding of Turkish universities in 2011-2012 academic year .................... 30
Figure 5: Status of the students ............................................................................. 37
Figure 6: Study level of the students ..................................................................... 38
Figure 7: Gender of the students .......................................................................... 38
Figure 8: Countries the students visited ................................................................. 39
Figure 9: Years that students participated in the program ......................................... 40
Figure 10: Previous abroad experience of the students ............................................ 40
Figure 11: Reasons that students participate in the program .................................... 47
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

The emerging global structure requires interaction between societies and the international flow of knowledge. According to Yang (2002), interest in international activities in higher education brought about the wider use of the internationalization concept. Teichler (2004b) explained the concept of internationalization as an increase of cross-border activities. Although internationalization was linked to specific international programs and student exchanges, currently it is a more complex and continuous process including strategic ventures and more global connotations (Bostrom, 2010). The educational dimension of internationalization is a complex system including multiple components. According to Ayoun, Johnson, Vanhyfte, and O'Neill (2010), internationalization of higher education has several dimensions including students, faculty, curriculum, research, organizational support, and international networking.

Regarding the student dimension, the authors stated that study abroad programs help students directly engage with other societies. Even though internationalization refers to various activities, student exchange among different countries is an important dimension. In other words, the worldwide trend of study abroad is one way of internationalization (Ileleji, 2009). Studies of Schwald (2012) and Liu and Dai (2012) also addressed student exchange as an important component of internationalization of education.

When the internationalization concept is examined from a higher education perspective, the study of Munar (2007), introduced the Bologna Process phenomenon as a factor of globalization of tourism education. The Bologna Process, beginning in 1999, creates
opportunities to connect the educational systems by voluntary participation in the European Union (What is the Bologna process?, n. d.). Munar (2007) examined the impact of the Bologna Process on tourism education and concluded that globalization of higher education in Europe is positively affected by the process. Regions like Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and India, China, and Brazil also witness a rapid growth that creates the need for internationally experienced hospitality and tourism graduates to fill the needs of that multicultural and global society (Ayoun et al., 2010). These students’ perceptions about the industry and its international dynamic is vital for the industry, and international experience is vital for positive perceptions about the industry. Aksu and Köksal (2005) found that tourism major students who had international experience during their studies have a positive attitude toward the tourism industry. The authors also stated the negative perception of the field might cause low academic success. Thus, it can be concluded that the international experience can positively affect academic success by impacting the perception of the students. Cammelli (2001) stated that Italian graduate students who had been studying abroad were more successful in their university studies. At that point, the tourism industry cannot be thought of as separate from tourism education, and the international experience of students and the cross-cultural transfer of knowledge are vital parts of both higher education and the tourism industry. Schwald (2012) stated the international perception and knowledge about interacting with people from other national and cultural backgrounds is important for business students. In the global tourism industry, international experience is also vital for tourism students. Munar (2007) stated that as the value of the tourism industry is recognized in the international platform, tourism education becomes more critical. According to Ayoun et al. (2010), due to global competition in the industry, the education that enables students to have global understanding and critical analysis skills becomes even more critical for the
tourism industry, and the internationalization of education provides high quality and international academic standards.

One way for internationalization of education is the lifelong learning concept, which has various subgroups including a student exchange program in higher education. Stilianos, Georgios, Vasilik, and Labros (2013) stated that lifelong learning is vital in the competitive knowledge economy environment. Life Long Learning (LLP), with a €7 billion budget between 2007 and 2013, provides opportunities for learning experiences, education, and training across Europe (Lifelong Learning Programme, n. d.). The Bologna Process is one component of LLP for European Union Education Programs. Munar (2007) pointed out that the Bologna Process has had significant effects on tourism research and scholarship in Europe. Teichler (2009) also argued that in Europe the internationalization of higher education is strongly affected by the Bologna Process.

Erasmus, which serves as one dimension of student exchange in higher education, is one of the subgroups of the LLP of the European Commission (About Lifelong Learning Programme, n. d.). At the institutional level, the program helps to create confidence and experience in international aspects (Vossensteyn, Lanzendorf, and Souto-Otero, 2008). The study also revealed that Erasmus is the trigger for internationalization of the institutions as well as contributing to visibility and attractiveness of the institutions. Teichler (2004a) stated that study mobility is the most important aspect of internationalization, and the Erasmus program is the main driver of study mobility.

With an average of 230,000 students per year from European Union members and countries such as Croatia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, and Turkey, a total of
almost three million students since 1987, a €450,000 annual budget, the involvement of 33 countries and approximately 4,000 institutions, Erasmus is the most successful study abroad program in the world (Lifelong Learning Programme, n. d).

Turkey, as a candidate for joining the European Union, started the program in the 2004-2005 academic year with 1,142 outgoing students and this number reached 10,263 outgoing students by the 2011-2012 academic year (Ulusal Ajans, n. d.).

1.1.1 Academic impacts of study abroad

Stilianos et al. (2013) stated that because of the Erasmus program, students can gain experience in different educational systems and be involved in other learning processes. According to the authors, the Erasmus program prefers multiculturalism and intercultural education. For example, during his study abroad program, one student noticed that the curriculum included an intercultural education class in the country he studied, and this particular class is not available in Turkey (Yavaş, Demir, & Polat, 2011). Exposure to different cultures and different styles of education is one purpose of the Erasmus program, and it can be concluded that the change in students’ expectations is inevitable at the end of the program.

Study abroad programs, including Erasmus, are also great opportunities for students in higher education to gain experience. In their testimonials, students who came back from the Erasmus program identified the program as life changing and an excellent opportunity for their academic and personal improvement as well as the career aspect (European Commission, n. d.). In other studies exchange students expressed similar feelings and defined their experience as “life changing,” “turning point,” “experience of a lifetime,” “eye-opening,” and “horizon-broadening.” (Ileleji, 2009; Tekin & Gencer, 2013; Teichler, 2004a).
After that experience, students changed in terms of their expectation and satisfaction levels. As Özdem (2013) stated, comparing home and host universities and making suggestions to apply good examples learned abroad to their home university are notable impacts on students as they have the chance to compare different aspects of their education and daily life.

In the literature there are some studies that emphasized the personal and cultural impact of study abroad and the Erasmus program. These studies mainly focused on cultural or personal impacts of study abroad programs rather than academic aspects (Sancak, 2009; Şahin, 2007; Yavaş et al., 2011; Demir & Demir, 2009).

In contrast, in some studies students pointed to the academic aspect as a main driver for their study abroad decision (Stilianos, 2013; Mutlu, Alacahan & Erdil, 2010). Goodman and Berdan (2013) stated that study abroad should not be considered as a separated activity from education. The authors stated that study abroad should be integrated into the curriculum and assist in internationalizing student learning. In his study Schwald (2012) found that in addition to the cultural exchanges, students were willing to enhance academic understanding in their field. Inui, Wheeler, and Lankford (2006) stated that the sociological dimension should be well integrated into the curriculum. In that case tourism graduates would be able to think critically and estimate the results of social concepts. Therefore, in addition to cultural and personal gains, the academic aspect still remains the main part of study abroad programs.

Due to academic impacts, it becomes important to identify students’ perceptions and the impact of study abroad programs on their academic expectations. Academic can be a broad term to examine. In her study, Certel (2010) classified data about the academic life of Turkish students under subtitles including classes, lecturers, learning environment, language, evaluation,
libraries, and education in the multicultural environment. Although there are numerous studies about the academic aspect of the programs in terms of academic expectation and satisfaction, few studies examine how study abroad programs academically impact and change the academic expectation of students at their home institutions and in their learning environment.

As the study abroad experience was defined as “life changing,” “eye-opening,” and “horizon-broadening,” coming back home from this experience is not easy for students. Storti (2001) stated that every single exchange student experienced different circumstances before, during, and after the study abroad period. Although circumstances vary from student to student, these students experience some common problems after their arrival back to their home country. Gaw (2000) stated that the literature indicated these common problems include academic problems, depression and anxiety, and interpersonal difficulties. These problems are defined as re-entry shock. Thomson and Christofi (2006) identified the concept as the readjustment process into the home culture following an abroad experience.

Although there are some other studies, which take the academic aspect as one of the impacts of re-entry (Sussman, 1986; Gaw, 2000; Şahin, 1990; Fichtner, 1988), Gaw (2000) remarked that the academic problems college students experience after returning to their home culture is not clear. Even though the personal- and relationship-based problems are widely researched, there are few studies that point to the academic problems as one of the re-entry issues.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The internationalization of education has been studied in various aspects and in various business fields such as finance, international marketing, accounting, and economics, and in
various countries such as China, South Africa, and the Middle East (Ayoun et al., 2010). In addition, as a dimension of internationalization, study abroad programs and the Erasmus program are studied in the tourism area or other fields in Turkey. Despite the emphasis on the cultural aspect of Erasmus by participants, the academic expectation (high quality education) still remains the first reason according to some sources (Mutlu et al., 2013; Stilianos et al., 2013). However, the studies in the literature that address the academic impacts in terms of change of academic expectations of students after studying abroad are limited. Additionally, although the expectations of the program, satisfaction levels, and adaptation to the host culture are examined in detail, re-adjustment to the academic life and the home culture still remain unclear.

In this respect, the objectives of this study are:

1. To document the different types of study abroad experiences
2. To document changes in learning expectations
3. To examine effects of study abroad on students’ culture
4. To analyze the impact on the classroom
5. To analyze the adjustments that students have made

1.3 Significance of the Study

In the literature of study abroad, there is a great body of knowledge related to the reasons for studying abroad. In addition, as a specific way of study abroad, the Erasmus program is widely researched in terms of reasons and impacts. The concept of Erasmus also is examined from the perspective of areas such as sociology, education, social services, business, anthropology, and public administration. However, as this study mainly focuses on the academic
impacts of study abroad, the change of student expectations, and their re-adjustment process to the home culture, the results are beneficial for students, faculty members, and institutions.

Satisfied expectations of students and proper support to overcome the difficulties after coming back to their home country could provide a smoother transition and help them improve the academic success as the programs intends. In addition, identifying the impacts and how study abroad would change the expectation could enable institutions to provide proper opportunities to returnees.

1.4 Terms and Definitions

Study abroad is an extensive term that includes various forms of experience in another country in various periods. According to Scwhald (2012), spending one or more semesters in another country and getting a degree from an international institution or limited time programs such as a number of days or weeks are all considered study abroad programs. However, in this study Erasmus will be used as one specific subgroup of study abroad or the exchange program in higher education for either one or two semesters under the Socrates program (until 2006), the Life Long Learning Program (2007-2013), or the Erasmus+ Program (beginning in 2014).

*Globalization* and *internationalization* are used interchangeably in this study. Teichler (2004b) explained globalization as a further step of internationalization where the boundaries become unclear, whereas Jordan (2008) used the terms interchangeably. In this study, globalization and internationalization will refer to the same concept, which is the international and cross-cultural flow of knowledge through student exchange programs.
Reverse culture shock and re-entry shock are used interchangeably and refer to the adjustments that returnees should make in order to adapt back into their own culture after experiencing a different environment.

For this study, participants, returnees, and students are used interchangeably and refer to individuals who participated in and came back from the Erasmus program.

Home institution refers to the university the participants attended in Turkey for their higher education, and host institution refers to the university that students attended during their Erasmus period.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Internationalization

Improvement of knowledge is possible with global activities (Yang, 2002). According to the author, since the purpose of universities is improving knowledge, they should be international institutions, and this commitment to advancing the knowledge requires international cooperation. In addition, since globalization in the economy and academic system is an unavoidable aspect of the millennium, higher education should fit the new global system through the assistance of internationalization practices (Altbach & Teichler, 2001). The close relation between higher education and the international dimension brings the popular term of internationalization into the higher education (Yang, 2002).

Internationalization is defined from various perspectives in the literature. It refers to consistent and permanent cross border activities (Teichler, 2009). These activities are addressed in various aspects. For example, Bostrom (2010) stated that the term recently refers to the strategic actions to create global impacts as opposed to its former use for international programs and student exchange in the past. Waters (2009) also states internationalization of education includes partnerships among universities or agreements among institutions in different countries. Jakson (2008) pointed to the internships and globalized curricula for the international concept.

In higher education, the practices of internationalization include distance education, franchise of education programs and degrees, and a global academic marketplace for students (Altbach & Teichler, 2001), joint degree programs between universities in different locations, language course offerings, and international research projects (Schwald, 2012), and the exchange of cultures through teaching, research, and other services (Yang, 2002).
Ayoun et al. (2010) stated that as an ongoing process, internationalization includes international, global, and intercultural dimensions, and international networks as aspects of internationalization.

In addition to above-mentioned components, research in the international dimension (Yang, 2002; Ayoun et al., 2010; Schwald, 2012), curriculum (Ayoun et al., 2010; Jordan, 2008; Caruana & Ploner, 2011), offshore campuses (Jakson, 2008; Waters, 2009; Altbach & Teichler, 2001); and student and faculty (Zhang, Lu, Hu, & Adler, 2010; Ayoun et al., 2010; Schwald, 2012) are components of internationalization of the higher education.

The report of Caruana and Ploner (2011) groups some successful internationalization practices as follows:

- International graduate employment: by improving and maintaining international knowledge transfer and various cooperation.
- Curricular teaching and learning activities: by supporting international activities in terms of team and group work in their learning environments.
- Extra-curricular teaching and learning activities: by supporting international trips for students so that they would be able to improve their critical thinking skills.
- Networks and partnerships: by academic exchange programs in order to experience a variety of knowledge and practices.

2.2 Internationalization of Tourism Education

When the internationalization concept is examined from the tourism education perspective, multicultural and global societies, global competition, and an increase in
international business are the developments that created the demand for internationally experienced students to adapt well to changes both in society and business life (Ayoun et al., 2010). A study by Munar (2007) stated that tourism education is a sub-group of the tourism system and includes students at the micro level, departments at the intermediate level, and institutions at the macro level. Therefore, the importance of study abroad programs should be evaluated both from student and institution perspectives. Because exchange programs are beneficial not only for the students but also for the institutions and society, these three aspects cannot be considered separately (Göksan, Uzundurukan, & Keskin, 2009).

In their quantitative study, Zhang et al. (2010) examined the internationalization of hospitality and tourism education in China and stated that in order to improve the internationalization of the education, various aspects such as exchange of tourism talents and collaboration in terms of teaching and research should be improved, as well as exchange programs in general. The authors emphasized the importance of international student numbers in order to analyze the internationalization of higher education. Cvikl and Artic (2013) stated that the mobility of students is considered positively by the tourism companies, and the students with study abroad experience are more likely to be hired by companies.

2.3 Consequences of Internationalization of Higher Education

Internationalization of higher education is examined in various countries in terms of its consequences. The research of Ayoun et al. (2010) examined the consequences of internationalization of US and non-US hospitality programs and found that an increase in academic quality and strength of the research dimension are academic-related benefits of internationalization. The study of Bostrom (2010) examined the concept in Turkey through a
case study that compares two universities in terms of their usage and contribution to the other nation’s knowledge. Based on the literature, the author revealed both the negative and positive consequences of internationalization. However, the author stated that mutual learning, a broadened perspective, exposure to the other cultures, and the ability to study abroad were the positive consequences of internationalization for the two Turkish universities examined in that study.

2.4 Study Abroad

Although the literature of internationalization refers to various activities from various perspectives such as research, offshore campuses, curriculum integration, and strategic cooperation; study abroad programs, exchange programs, and mobility of students are the practices commonly addressed by the majority of the studies (Liu & Dai, 2012; Ayoun et al., 2010; Yang 2002; Schwald 2012; Caruana & Ploner 2011; Zhang et al., 2010). Study abroad programs could be for various periods of time: one or more semesters, a longer period of time to earn a degree from an international institution, or several days or weeks (Schwald, 2012). In their study on internationalization of higher education in Europe, Ritzen and Marconi (2011) stated that the majority of study abroad participants prefer going to nearby countries to their home country. According to the authors, this close distance was preferred as it enabled lower costs and made it easier to keep contacts in their home country. Additionally, Aksu & Köksal (2005) stated that the distance and the security restrictions after 9/11 prevent Turkish tourism major students to have their work experience in the US. At that point, Europe remains an attractive study abroad location for Turkish students.
Zhang et al. (2010) stated that exchange programs have a great impact on internationalization of education. The authors emphasized the academic aspect of study abroad programs and stated that these programs have great importance for students as they provide opportunities to see different teaching and research styles in other countries. After the study abroad program, students are more interested in courses that have international perspectives (Ayoun et al., 2010). Therefore, study abroad programs trigger the students’ international perceptions, which consequently contribute to the internationalization of education.

By using both qualitative and quantitative data in their comprehensive study, Krupnik and Krzaklewska (2007) found students’ answers for the reasons of studying abroad address three dimensions—academic, social, and problem solving. In the study, among these motivations, the social aspect is the most important and the problem-solving aspect is the least important for students to consider for study abroad decisions.
Figure 1: Dimensions of study abroad


Ileleji (2009) stated that participants of exchange programs believe experiencing new cultures is life changing. When the study of Krupnik and Krzaklewska (2007) is considered, the experience of new cultures can impact students in academic, social, and career dimensions.

2.5 Erasmus Program

Yang (2002) stated internationalization should be considered together with its components for a sufficient evaluation, and this is only possible by evaluating the specific components. At that point, examining the Erasmus program as a subgroup of study abroad programs and revealing the program’s impacts and results would help to understand the internationalization in higher education both in Turkey and in other countries. Teichler (2009) pointed out the Erasmus program, which started in 1987, is the main trigger of internationalization of education, and the programs popularity has been increasing every year.
The purposes of the program are improving transparency, cooperation between institutions, innovation practices, and quality of education at the higher education level (Erasmus, n. d.). According to the study of Vossensteyn et al., (2008), among the various impacts of the Erasmus program, internationalization of teaching and learning is the strongest one.

Stilianos et al. (2013) stated Europe is the pioneer for the university concept due to Western civilization. Tourism education started after the technical and vocational schools developed in Europe (Inui et al., 2006). Due to Europe’s leading role in the education and its commitment to the exchange of knowledge, the Erasmus program should be examined in higher education, specifically tourism education dimension.

In order to examine the globalization of tourism education, Munar (2007) examined the impacts of the Bologna process, which enables the exchange of knowledge in Europe. The author stated that Bologna process impacted the research and scholarship dimensions of tourism in Europe. The process started by the Bologna Declaration that signed in Bologna by 29 European ministers who were responsible for higher education in European countries. The declaration intended to improve the internationalization of higher education by referring to mobility in Europe as well as other efforts (Teichler, 2009). This mobility was mainly connected with the Erasmus program. Bostrom (2010) also stated the Bologna process and Erasmus program have great impacts on internationalization.

After examining the progress of the Erasmus program, it is possible to examine the Erasmus student exchange program under three main phases:
1st phase under the Socrates program (until 2007)

2nd phase under the Life Long Learning Program (2007-2013)

3rd phase under the Erasmus+ program (starting in 2014)

Starting from its first year in Turkey, the program provides opportunities for visiting other countries, exchanging cultures, and experiencing various learning and teaching styles. Therefore, the program is being examined from various perspectives due to its importance for the internationalization of education.

2.6 Reasons to Go and Expectations of Students

The literature shows that the main reasons students prefer study abroad through the Erasmus program are varied. Some studies find that experiencing new cultures was the main reason, whereas other studies find academic purposes and career intentions as main reasons. Since the Erasmus+ Program Guide (2014) indicates improving learning performance and intercultural awareness as desired outcomes, it can be concluded that the program purposes and student motivation are closely related both in academic and cultural aspects.

It can be said that students’ main reason is gaining new experience in various fields. According to Mirici, İłter, Saka, and Glover (2009), the goals addressed in the literature can be summarized into three groups—mobility, competencies, and understanding.
Table 1: Erasmus exchange goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category of aim</th>
<th>Sub-category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Mobility        | Adaptive, contrastive, or integrative education  
                  | Future Employment |
| Competencies    | Formal study, qualifications, knowledge, and life skills |
| Understanding   | People (self and others)  
                  | Change of outlook |


When the table subcategories are examined, it can be deduced that the new experience could be in an academic, cultural, or personal dimension; therefore, the experience dimension is the main motivation. Participants of the program address acknowledge Erasmus as a unique opportunity for the new experiences (Ileleji, 2009; Teichler, 2004a; Tekin & Gencer, 2013).

The study of Krupnik and Krzaklewska (2007) that focused on the motivations of the students and their rights in Europe throughout the exchange process gathered quantitative data from over 12,000 Erasmus students who were studying at European universities. The results
revealed that the students fall into two groups in terms of their motivation. These two groups are experience oriented students (53% of the sample) and career oriented students (47% of the sample). The authors correlated the motivation of students with their personality and stated that students who are female, older, having lower family income than the country’s average, and are from central and eastern Europe made a career-oriented decision to participate in the Erasmus program.

**Figure 2: Classification of Erasmus program students**

![Classification of Erasmus program students](image)


Based on the finding of that report, students from Turkey, which is located at the very eastern part of Europe, are expected to be more career oriented and are expected to participate in the program with more academic expectations rather than personal and cultural expectations. The study of Mutlu et al. (2010) examines the cultural and personal changes that students from Turkey and Europe experienced during the Erasmus program. The study was conducted with 257
Turkish and European Erasmus students through questionnaires and interviews. Before participating in the program, both groups from Turkey and Europe expected improvement of academic knowledge, as well as experience in a new country and culture. The study revealed that after Erasmus program being open to new cultures changed the prejudices of the students positively.

2.7 Impacts of Study Abroad

Similar to the reasons for going to Erasmus and the students’ expectations of the program, the literature indicates various impacts and primary gains of the students.

The study of Mutlu et al. (2010) revealed a sample of the students from Turkey and Europe experienced personal changes after the program.

According to Ünal (2013), after examining various studies of students’ perceptions about the impacts of Erasmus, the impacts in the literature can be classified as follows:

- Individual impacts
- Academic impacts
- Social impacts
- Language impacts
- Cultural impacts

These impacts also are similar to the reasons for joining Erasmus and the expectations of the program.

The benefits and impacts of the program generally are classified in several dimensions such as academic, personal, cultural, and language. However, the main segmentation could be
academic impacts that include language impacts and change in learning expectations, and social impacts could include individual and cultural impacts. However, the impacts are also interconnected, and personal gain could influence the academic aspect, or cultural impacts could influence the personal impacts. Even though cultural and personal gains are the main motivators for some students to join the program, Goodman and Berdan (2013) stated that exchange programs should not be considered as a separate activity from education. The authors stated that study abroad should be integrated into the curriculum and help to internationalize students’ learning. For example, Demir and Demir (2009) stated the participants of the Erasmus program experience the differences between the education systems of different countries and obtain a critical thinking ability. Although the authors classified this impact as a personal impact, forming a critical thinking ability could be considered as beneficial in terms of academic requirements. As a matter of fact, the authors stated that students believe they academically improved by improving their native language, by gaining self-confidence in their profession, and even by learning a second language.

Özdem (2013) conducted the qualitative study with 24 former Erasmus students and the majority of the students found the program beneficial in terms of academic gains. As another example of academic impact, Cammelli (2001) stated that the Italian graduate students who had been studying abroad had a greater use of university sources, were more successful in university studies, and were more critical of their home institution.

As an individual impact, the study of Mutlu et al. (2010) revealed that 88% of Turkish students stated they had elevated their self-confidence, whereas the number is 42.9% for EU students. The cultural impact can exist in various ways including corporate culture. For example,
the study of Yavaş, Demir, and Polat (2011) revealed that the professionalism, informal communication styles, and working styles of the other institutions had a great impact on the Turkish students in terms of their expectations from the corporate culture.

2.8 Returning From Study Abroad and Re-entry

After the experience that is defined as “life changing,” it is not easy to come back to the home culture. Re-entry or reverse culture shock is basically defined as the process of readjustment to home after being abroad (Thompson & Christofi, 2006). It is coming back to the old world with the new personality after experiencing challenges in areas such as personality and beliefs (Tips for re-entry, n. d.). The study of Storti (2001) focused on re-entry experiences of various groups and stated that being a returnee seemed like being a minority, as now the returnee sees many things differently from rest of the society.

Re-entry shock can even cause some physical problems such as lack of appetite and flu, (Storti, 2001) along with anxiety, depression, lack of understanding from relatives and friends, change of lifestyles, change of relationships, and a desire to go back (Cohen, 2003). According to the author, the re-entry shock could cause serious depression that requires medical treatment. However, surprisingly, students experiencing high-level reverse culture shock are more unlikely seek professional help (Gaw, 2000). The author stated this is because high-level reverse culture shock might affect the judgment of help need.

The concept of re-entry is a critical issue not only for returnees but also for people who are managing the re-entry process of returnees (Szkudlarek, 2010), and the process is related not only with returnees but also with siblings, families, and friends who can also feel the effects as well as the returnees (Martin, 1986). If the process could be managed properly by returnees and
people around them, returnees could create positive impacts on the environment to which they are coming back.

Based on the literature, the re-entry process also could be problematic for several groups such as spouses and children, international company employees, and students (Cohen, 2003; Szkudlarek, 2010). However, Szkudlarek (2010) concluded the literature is dominated by the re-entry issues of corporate assignees. According to Citron (1996), the personal and relationship-based re-entry problems are widely researched, and at that point, re-entry shock can happen in four dimensions—physical, interpersonal, cultural, and personal. When it comes to re-entry of students, Cohen (2003) examined the impact of re-entry culture shock on short-term sojourners and claimed there are limited studies on re-entry culture shock and even less for returnee students. Gaw (2000) also remarked that the academic problems experienced by college students after returning to their home culture is not clear.

However, some research addresses the academic aspects of re-entry through empirical studies. For example, Fichtner (1988) stated that the students who came back to Japan found academic re-entry difficult, whereas they did not experience any problem in social and overall re-entry. Gaw (2000) conducted a study in the US surveying 66 American college students who completed their high school education overseas and returned to the US. The author used a Personal Problem Inventory (PPI) scale including 22 personal problem subscales. Among those academic-related problems were adjustment to college, academic performance, test anxiety, and trouble studying. As can be seen in the table, a majority of students pointed out adjustment to college as a problem.
Table 2: Personal problem subscale responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not a problem (%)</th>
<th>Problem (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adjustment to college</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>68.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic performance</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>51.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trouble studying</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test anxiety</td>
<td>56.1</td>
<td>43.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Wielkiewicz and Turkowski (2010) also stated that the students who just came from study abroad stated that their course and homework load increased. However, the authors stated that as time passes, students are less likely to indicate the academic aspect as a serious problem. Although several studies examined the academic aspect of re-entry (Sussman, 1986; Fichtner, 1988; Şahin, 1990; Gaw, 2000), considering the importance of the issue, the number of studies that point to academic problems as part of re-entry problems for exchange students is still relatively low.

Although re-entry shock and adjustment processes vary widely, some common factors affect that re-entry shock. Szkudlarek (2010) stated as the gap gets bigger between home and host culture, readjustment can be more difficult. However, Cohen (2003) searched the issue with nine female French students who came back from the UK, and the author found that even
between culturally similar countries, reverse culture shock happens and can even cause serious problems. There are other reasons that affect the level of re-entry shock, and according to the author these effects are gender, age, culture, time spent abroad, personal life before the student leaves the home country, experience in the host country, a similar abroad experience previously, and keeping in touch with the home culture during study abroad period.

Adaptation to the host culture also is stated as one of the experiences that impacts reverse culture shock. A negative correlation exists between adaptation to the host country and re-entry culture shock. Based on the study of Sussman (1986), students who successfully adapted to the host country have more serious problems to adapt back. The author explained that often the people who adapt well to the host country experience some considerable changes in terms of values, attitudes, and perceptions, and their re-entry becomes more problematic. Gaw (2000) also stated that the students who had high-level reverse culture shock had more adjustment problems compared to students who had low-level reverse culture shock.

Another dimension of re-entry shock is gender. In her study, Şahin (1990) found that, while the secondary school returnees do not exhibit differences in terms of gender, at the high school level females had more academic adjustment problems than their male peers. Brabant, Palmer, and Gramling (1990) also found that females reported more re-entry adjustment concerns in daily life. However, Fichtner (1988) stated that none of the variables of sex, age, years spent abroad, type of school attended abroad, type of school currently attended, and area of sojourn had an effect on academic readjustment. The author suggested that the abilities gained by the students overseas might even have helped them to overcome readjustment problems.
Szkudlarek (2010) stated that although the re-entry concept is widely examined, the support practices are not commonly examined or are just tentative suggestions rather than definitive. However, some special help has been offered by several authors to deal with the re-entry shock of returnees. Listening to other friends’ experiences was suggested as a solution to deal with re-entry problems (Tips for re-entry, n. d.). Talking and sharing experiences and concerns with others who have returned from study abroad is another solution (Brack, n. d.). Wielkiewicz and Turkowski (2010) also stated that sharing re-entry experiences in focus groups can help students deal with their re-entry problems. Gaw (2000) suggested discussion groups for returnees to share their experiences might reduce the effect of re-entry shock. Brack (n. d.) stated that one of the top ten re-entry challenges was that the people in returnees’ lives were not that enthusiastic about listening to their experiences. The findings of Cohen (2003) supported that idea, as it found that if relatives and friends undervalued possible re-entry problems, it could cause a problem for those returnees. In the study, five out of nine returnees also emphasized that their families and friends were not interested in their experiences. In short, lack of understanding from relatives and friends is another difficulty that returnees experience.

At that point it becomes more important to provide a proper environment and opportunities for returnees to come together and share their experiences in a group. Isogai, Hayashi, and Uno (1999) stated that re-entry trainings can be a solution for Japanese returnees who are adult learners in their late teens or mid-thirties. One focus of the trainings should be the knowledge such as language, educational information, and values. The authors also pointed out that some Japanese schools offered separate classes for English and Japanese. Using the same
techniques that were used to adjust to the host country also was suggested as another readjustment method (Tips for re-entry, n. d.).

After a comprehensive review of the literature about re-entry, Szkudlarek (2010) indicated the studies about re-entry are mostly fragmented, as they point to different aspects of the issue. Therefore, the author concluded that it was not possible to conduct meta-analysis for the re-entry concept; thus the literature review about re-entry is more descriptive. In the same study, the author listed over 150 studies about different aspects of re-entry. However, among those studies, only one study was conducted in Turkey and that is the study of Şahin (1990). Thus, re-entry issues of Turkish students remain a gap in the literature. Additionally, although the Erasmus program is raising this issue as a part of the internationalization concept, being ready for the returnees from this popular program becomes even more critical to benefit from the program. Therefore, a study that focuses on the academic aspect of re-entry for Turkish students can fill a gap in the literature for the re-entry concept.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction of Method

This study mainly focuses on the following areas: academic impacts of the Erasmus program; the other, most common study abroad programs in Turkey; the tourism and hospitality major students; and reverse culture shock experienced by Erasmus students. Therefore, the findings strongly depend on feelings, ideas, and expressions of the participants. For that reason, it is not easy to evaluate the Erasmus experience and its impacts based on standard survey questions. According to Walliman (2011, p. 72-73), data that is descriptive by its nature, such as ideas, customs, and beliefs, are measured in a qualitative way. Additionally, similar studies conducted in Turkey to reveal the Erasmus students’ lives and Erasmus impacts are generally based on qualitative data (Gül, 2013; Göksu, 2011; Certel, 2010; Şahin, 2007). Therefore, comparing the results of similar studies using the qualitative method is the proper way to distinguish the similarities and differences among similar studies in Turkey.

For the above-mentioned reasons, the qualitative method was chosen as the main tool to collect the data through semi-structured interviews (Appendices A and B). In order to be consistent with the literature and study objectives, the questions were formed based on the literature, similar studies, and the study’s objectives.

Although the main data collection method was qualitative, the students were contacted and invited to participate in the study through a survey. The survey intent was to reach to the students, collect their demographics as general information, and invite them to participate in an interview about their experiences (Appendix C and Appendix D).
Nine students were interviewed for the study. In order to get detailed information about their experiences, the number of participants can be considered as adequate. Additionally, the number of students in the sample group was large enough to get insightful data by qualitative methods. Similar qualitative studies about Erasmus or re-entry also have similar numbers of students for the sample (Cohen, 2003; İşeri, 2005).

3.2 Data Collection Process

The sample for this study is former Erasmus students from Anadolu University Tourism Department, Turkey. There are various reasons for choosing Anadolu University’s Tourism Department students. First, according to National Agency Erasmus 2004-2005 Statistics (Ulusal Ajans, n.d.), the university was one of the 46 universities that sent students abroad during the program’s first year in Turkey in 2004. According to the report, with 68 outgoing students, whereas the total number for all universities in Turkey was 1142, Anadolu University was ranked fourth in terms of outgoing students in the first year of the program in Turkey.

In addition, according to National Agency’s 2011-2012 Erasmus Numbers Report (Ulusal Ajans, n.d.), which was the most current report while this study was conducted, Anadolu University was the second university among 132 private and state universities in Turkey in terms of the number of outgoing students. Anadolu University had 438 outgoing students, following Yıldız Technical University with 469 outgoing students. According to the same report, the total number of outgoing students in the 2011-2012 academic year was 10,263.
The report also stated that based on the funding provided by the European Union, Anadolu University was the seventh university with €912,300 in funding, whereas the total funding of 132 private and state universities was €27,389,706 during the 2011-2012 academic year.

Figure 3: Number of outgoing students in 2011-2012 academic year

Figure 4: Funding of Turkish universities in 2011-2012 academic year
Based on the above reasons, it can be said that the university has considerable experience with the program. Therefore, the sample chosen from that university could be considered a proper sample in terms of the Erasmus experience.

After choosing Anadolu University students as the study sample, the researcher contacted the coordinator of the Office for International Affairs at the institution via e-mail asking permission to send a survey to former Erasmus students from the Tourism department.

As a first step, a survey was sent to the office in January 2014 to be forwarded to the former Erasmus students. The survey asked demographic questions and invited students to participate in the interviews. Students were given ten days to fill out the survey. In that ten-day
period, 11 students filled out the survey, and 6 of these students were willing to participate in the interviews about their Erasmus experience.

In order to increase the number of participants, the Erasmus coordinator of the department and a faculty member were contacted in March 2011 to increase the number of participants. After this endeavor, three more students volunteered to participate in the interviews, and these students contacted the researcher via e-mail indicating that they would participate in the interviews.

The interviews took place between April 20 and May 9, 2014. Because the researcher conducted the study in the US, face-to-face interviews with students in Turkey were impossible. Therefore, based on the choices of the interviewees, they were interviewed through either a Skype conversation or a phone call. After asking permission of each participant at the beginning of the conversation, the calls were recorded.

At the beginning of each conversation, the participants were told that the purpose of the study is to evaluate the Erasmus experience of individuals; therefore, there were no ideal, expected, or right or wrong answers, and they were free to speak on any issue they wanted in response to each question. Participants also were told that the study would not include any of their identifying information such as name, Skype address, or phone number, and they would be mentioned in the study as Student 1, Student 2, and so forth.

Since the data collection method was a semi-structured interview, the researcher asked questions that were prepared before the interview. However, based on some answers of the participants, some additional questions were directed to some of the participants or they were asked to explain in detail some of the issues they mentioned.
3.3 Participants - Description of the Sample

In total nine students, five male, four female, participated in the study. These students participated in the Erasmus program between 2011 and 2013, and except for one student who stayed for two semesters, the remaining students stayed abroad for one semester. The youngest participant was born in 1994, and the oldest participant was born in 1988. Therefore, the age of participants varied between 20 and 26. Among the nine students, six visited Poland, two visited Spain, and one visited Austria. Five stated they did not have prior experience abroad, whereas four of them had been abroad for various reason such as academic, Work and Travel Program, and vacation.

3.4 Instruments

3.4.1 Survey

After research of the literature, the questions were formed in English. After a discussion with the advisor of the study and finalization of the survey in English, it was translated into Turkish by the researcher, and the Turkish version of the survey was sent to a Turkish professor to be translated into English again to see whether there was a gap between the English and Turkish versions. As the English translation of the researcher and Turkish professor was almost identical, the Turkish version was finalized, and questions were prepared in the Survey Monkey program to be sent to the former Erasmus students.

Before sending the questions to former Erasmus students via Survey Monkey, the researcher filled out the online survey to test whether there were any technical problems. Then the survey was sent to four Turkish people, one undergraduate and two graduate hospitality
students, and an engineering major graduate student who all have Erasmus experiences. After the participants stated the survey was understandable and overall they did not find any problems, the survey was sent to former Erasmus students at Anadolu University.

3.4.2 Interview

After searching through the literature of study abroad, reverse culture shock, and the Erasmus program, and based on the study’s objectives, a semi-structured interview was established. The questions were prepared in English and discussed with the supervisor of the study. Then the questions were translated into Turkish by the researcher, and the Turkish version was sent to a Turkish faculty member who also checked the Turkish version of the survey in the previous step. Based on the suggestions of faculty members on both the English and Turkish versions, the questions were finalized in Turkish. According to the final interview questions, the questions were grouped into three subcategories: the lives of students before, during, and after Erasmus.

The final version of the interview also was tested with one of the students who took the survey as a pilot study. The interview last approximately 30 minutes and the interviewee answered the questions without asking for any extra explanation or clarification. Based on this interview, the participants of the study were informed that the survey would last approximately 30 minutes and to plan their conversation time accordingly.

The interviews took place at the time the participants stated they would be available. Among the actual interviews, the shortest interview took 20 minutes and the longest took 47 minutes to complete.
The first part of the interview includes the question of pre-Erasmus experience including the language level, academic satisfaction level at the home institution, and purpose of joining the program. These findings were important to analyze the impacts of the program and change of expectations after the program.

The second part is about Erasmus experience. The students were asked in detail about their academic life abroad in order to compare the Erasmus experience with the pre-Erasmus and post-Erasmus experience. This comparison is necessary to document the impacts of the study abroad experience and categorize the impacts of the program to validate the consistency with the purpose of the study.

The third part is mainly on re-entry and adaptation problems, cultural and academic impacts, and how the expectation of students has changed after experiencing a study abroad program, namely Erasmus. These questions are used to find out two other objectives of the study—how the program impacts the expectation of the learning environment and the adjustments that students made after the program in order to adapt to their home culture again.

After finishing the interviews, records of the conversations were typed by the researcher. Based on the literature on this topic, study objectives, and themes that are commonly mentioned by the participants, the themes are grouped as subcategories.

3.5 Data Analysis

The results of the qualitative data, in other words the ideas of the participants about the Erasmus program, were analyzed by linking them to themes in the literature and study
objectives. The themes are identified and grouped after the interviews, and each theme was analyzed in detail under the groups of study objectives.
Chapter 4: Findings and Result Analysis

4.1 Findings

Nine former Erasmus students, five male and four female, participated in the interviews. Among these students, six of them were still studying at the department as an undergraduate student at the time of interviews. Three of them had graduated, and among these students, one of them was working and the other two were not working.

Figure 5: Status of the students

Among the current students, three were in their fourth year, two were in their third year, and one was in his second year when the interview was conducted.
Figure 6: Study level of the students

![Current Level](image)

Figure 7: Gender of the students

![Gender](image)
The majority of the students preferred Poland for their Erasmus program. One student stated he had been to Poland for two weeks through a student exchange program, and he wanted to go to the same country again for the Erasmus program. Two students stated that since the country’s currency is not Euro, they thought life would be cheaper in Poland than other European countries. Other reasons for choosing Poland are having a friend who is studying there and the suggestions of former Erasmus students.
Figure 9: Years that students participated in the program

Figure 10: Previous abroad experience of the students
Among the students who have been abroad, two had been to the US for a Work and Travel Program for three months, one had been to Cyprus for a week, one had been to Holland for a week, and one had been to Poland for two weeks.

Two students who graduated participated in the Erasmus program in 2011, and seven participants had been abroad with Erasmus in 2013. It can be concluded that, as the majority of the students participated in the program at the current time, the experiences they share would be more accurate and up to date. As a matter of fact, as Student 4, a graduated male student who went abroad in 2011 stated:

*I could have provided more accurate and up to date information if you talked to me just after my re-entry. I just remember at the beginning it was very difficult to come back, and I remember the main reasons and main difficulties. However, I do not remember the details clearly.*

However, Student 6, a female student who also participated in the program in 2011, explained the re-entry process very clearly:

*I remember the time I first came back to Turkey. The specialist in my host institution mentioned a situation called post-Erasmus program and warned us to be ready. To be honest, I was making fun of it. I did not even think that I would have adjustment problems because I thought Turkey is more modern than Poland. Their buildings are old style, we have better architecture in Turkey. However, after I came back, I noticed that they have peace in their lives. Nobody cares what other people do, what other people wear. Here in Turkey, we feel the pressure of society.*
Brabant et al. (1990) found that female students report more adjustment problems in their re-entry process. Consistent with the statement of the authors in the above example, even though two students both participated in the program in 2011, a female student still feels the impact of living in another country and coming back to home country, whereas the male student just remembers that he had some problems but did not state them as current problems.

4.2 Analysis

As stated in the methodology chapter, the data and findings were analyzed based on study objectives and themes in literature. The findings of the literature and the themes that students addressed during the interviews based on their personal experience are grouped under the study objectives topics.

The findings are mainly consistent with the literature. For example, the students in the study identified the experience as *exceptional, perfect experience, and a great opportunity*. These findings are consistent with similar definitions in the literature such as *turning point, experience of a lifetime, and eye opening* (Ileleji, 2009; Tekin & Gencer, 2013; Teichler, 2004a).

However, there are some themes students mentioned were not that common in the literature of study abroad and its impacts. The first of these uncommon themes is visa issues of Turkish citizens. Four of the students stated that it is not easy to get a visa for travel to European countries as a Turkish student. The students stated that even if they can get the visa, it is for a limited time, generally not more than their visit period. For that reason, for every single visit to the same country or another European Union member country, they have to apply for a visa again and go through the same process. However, the Erasmus program provides them a chance to get a visa easily, as they are sponsored by their institution and the host school provides them
an invitation letter, and these two conditions make the visa process easy. Thus, they stated that one of the reasons for joining the program is having the chance to get a visa easily and for a longer period of time compared to their individual visits.

The second uncommon theme was their emphasis on their families. Two male and two female students stated they did not want to stay longer, either because they missed their families or their family did not let them to stay longer. They stated that because of the close ties to their family or their family’s impact on their decision, they did not want to extend the time abroad. However, surprisingly, three of these students stated they want to go abroad in the future either for their graduate studies or for career purposes. It can be concluded that, although their families were important in their decision for their first abroad experience, their elevated self-confidence made them plan a future in abroad despite their strong family ties.

The third uncommon theme is their statements about their communication levels with professors and friends before going to Erasmus. When they were asked if they experienced any differences in terms of interaction with professors and classmates after coming back, six of the students stated they did not experience any changes or differences because their relations with their professors and friends were already close before their abroad experience.

Student 3:

*Before going, I had really close relationships with my professors, and before joining Erasmus, I contacted them many times for detailed information about the program. Therefore, nothing has changed or improved, as our relations were already very warm. The only difference now is they’ve started introducing me as an example to freshmen and direct them to me if they have questions about the program.*
Student 4:

_I had really close relations with my friends, insomuch as they organized a party for me after I came back. They missed me and I missed them; therefore, I did not experience any re-entry problem. I also had good communication with my professors, and it is the same right now._

As six students stated they had successful relationships with friends and professors, and without any exception, every single participant stated that the program helped them increase their self-confidence, it might be concluded that the students who participate in the program are already extroverted, sociable, and self-confident people. The experience just enhances these characteristics; however, students who are introverted and not sociable are generally not enthusiastic about participating in the program.

The last uncommon theme stated by the students was the language level of the professors in host institutions. Even though a majority of the students found the education of the host institution better than their home institution in terms of the classroom environment, ways of teaching the class, and participation of the students, four student stated that the English level of the professors at their host institution was not satisfactory and not sufficient enough to give the lecture in English. According to the report of Vossensteyn et al., (2008), internationalization of learning and teaching styles is one purpose of the Erasmus program. Student and faculty members are seen as components of this internationalization concept (Zhang et al., 2010; Ayoun et al., 2010; Schwald, 2012). However, because students find the English language level of professors insufficient, it can be concluded that the English language level is one of the barriers for internationalization since it might block communication and exchange of knowledge.
Additionally, for students’ maximum academic benefit from the program, the English language level of professors should be considered a primary requirement. Sandgren, Ellig, Hovde, Krejci, and Rice (1999) stated that between the courses taught by teachers who studied abroad and those who did not, the students found the class taught by a professor who studied abroad to be more globalized. Özdem (2013) made the same point in a different dimension. The participant of study states as the professors do not have abroad experience, they are unable to guide the students in terms of their study abroad concerns. At that point, abroad experience of the faculty could be considered one of the requirements for the success of student exchange programs.

As a result, the uncommon themes in the literature that are addressed by the participants of this study are: easy visa process as a motivation for joining the program; family ties that impact the study abroad decision or its length of time; already successful and close relations with professors and friends that make students unaware of any difference after coming back; and unsatisfactory English language levels of professors in host institution as a barrier for knowledge exchange.

When the students were asked the reasons for participating in Erasmus, the common themes were gaining new experiences in terms of travel, language, new cultures, and life abroad, which are mainly consistent with the literature (Ileleji, 2009; Teichler 2004a; Tekin & Gencer, 2013. A sample of Sancak’s (2009) study stated that the first reason to join the program is academic (26.1%). That motivation is followed by learning new cultures and people (24.8%). Interestingly, none of the students in this study mentioned academic expectations as a reason for joining the program. However, when they were answering the question, “how did you spend your time abroad?” they all mentioned their time in the school in addition to other activities.
Tekin and Gencer (2013) stated that after receiving education in Europe, students compared the host country’s education system with the home country’s education system. Based on this finding, when students were asked for a comparison, and even a specific comparison title such as academic, cultural, or social that was not specified by the researcher, seven of the students started to make the comparison with academic issues, and two other students also included the academic differences in their responses. Except for one student, a majority of students stated that the host institution’s education system was better than Turkey and that their home institutions should use at least some host institution methods as examples.

Student 2:

After seeing the different system in other countries, the system of my home country in general is not satisfying anymore. For example, the school I went to made me use my full potential. I said “wow, I am capable to do all of these hard projects, assignments, and presentations.” Our schools are not encouraging that hard work. It is also the fault of students because students in Turkey tend to be lazy. However, schools in Turkey are not forcing us to be hard working. The system is based on just exams, and as long as you are ready for the exams, you will pass the class. Then you graduate without seeing your potential. They (schools in Turkey) should adapt the teaching styles of Europe in their systems.
Figure 11: Reasons that students participate in the program

Based on the study of Krupnik and Krzaklewska (2007), Erasmus students from Central and Eastern Europe are more career oriented and join the Erasmus program to improve their academic knowledge and language and to have an advantage for future careers. According to the study, the other group of students was experience oriented, meaning they joined the program in order to see new cultures, meet new people, and have new experiences. Based on this classification, students from Turkey, which is located in the eastern part of Europe, are expected to be more career oriented. Although the students stated language as one of their motivations, they mainly participated in the program for new experiences of cultures, countries, and people. At that point, conversely to the study of Krupnik and Krzaklewska (2007), Turkish students who are participating in the program are having an experience-oriented perception rather than a career-oriented perception.
Student 6:

*I traveled to other countries with my friends and alone. The other students from Europe were not as excited as Turkish people in terms of travelling. Because they are European Union citizens, they have a chance to go anywhere at any time as if they are travelling from one city to another. However, this is not the case for Turkish students. We need a visa, and it is not easy to get it, and it requires a lot of paperwork. However, at the invitation of the school, it is really easy to get the visa. Therefore, I wanted to have the advantage of that chance and try to travel as much as I can.*

The reason for this finding could be the tough visa process for Turkish students taking individual trips. As four students stated, Erasmus is the easy way to get the visa, and they see the program mainly as an opportunity to travel in Europe. Unlike Turkish students, since European students have the opportunity to travel in the Europe, the experience of Erasmus means more than a travel opportunity. This perception might set the expectation of Turkish students from the Erasmus program as an opportunity for travelling rather than an opportunity for studying. Therefore, experience-oriented expectations become the main motivators for Turkish students to make the Erasmus decision.

**4.2.1 Different types of study abroad experiences**

Students were asked how they spent their time during the Erasmus period. According to their responses, the main themes were travelling, social events such as parties, trips that are organized by the Erasmus office of the host institutions, and academic activities such as participating in classes, field trips, and group projects.
Academic experience is one of the main topics mentioned by every single participant. When they were asked how they spent their time abroad, with the exception of two students who stated they did not participate in school often, seven students stated that going to school was the main activity.

Regarding the school experience, they stated they used their full potential, prepared comprehensive projects that they had never done during their education in Turkey, participated in field trips, delivered presentations, and participated in group projects. As Stilianos et al. (2013) stated, the Erasmus program helps students experience different educational systems and learning styles. Participants of this study support the statement by acknowledging their involvement in various experiences in terms of academic activities during their Erasmus period. The study reveals that, although the reason for joining the program is not academic, the academic gains and academic experience becomes notable impacts for the students. Certel (2010) addressed the same finding and stated that even though students are joining the program with cultural and individual expectations, their expectations change direction and includes academic expectations over time.

However, six of the participants stated the professors were lenient with them during their studies because they were exchange students. Professors were lenient in terms of attendance, timing of the tests, and deadlines. That flexibility might be seen as the reason for the perception that overemphasizes cultural expectations and underemphasizes academic expectations. The leniency also could decrease the academic benefits of the program.
Student 2:

The classes were taught in totally different ways. I was really surprised at how much the projects and assignments were important in the class. However, professors were flexible and lenient. I experienced new styles; however, I could not learn that much because of this relaxed attitude toward us; there was no motivation as teachers were not forcing us to attend the class, to take the exams, etc. It would be much better if they have been stricter.

In addition, four students stated they were not taking the same classes with other domestic students. Instead, they had separate classes for international Erasmus students. Therefore, they were generally in contact with international Erasmus students but not with domestic students in the host countries.

It could be concluded that leniency toward Erasmus students and the separated classes are the reasons for a limited academic experience during the program. Additionally, since the professors see the program as a cultural exchange rather than an academic exchange, the academic impacts of the program remain limited. Goodman and Berdan (2013) stated that study abroad should not be considered as a separate activity from education. However, the study reveals that it is seen as a cultural experience even by the professors, and this attitude makes the academic dimension a minor motivation for joining the program.

Travel is the second topic they discussed about the experience of Erasmus. According to participants, seeing new countries, meeting new people during these trips, and experiencing new lifestyles are the main benefits of these travels. According to the students, interaction with
international people helped them understand different cultures and people and the expectations of people from various backgrounds.

Student 4:

I had a chance to travel to different countries and to observe different people. I became very open minded. For example, when I met new people in new countries, I tried to learn about their culture. I also tasted different foods in different countries and even the foods helped me to understand cultures.

Student 1:

My main purpose was travelling in Europe and I succeeded. Although other people stated their purpose was experiencing new cultures and new people, mine was just travelling around Europe, as it is not easy to find that kind of opportunity and that free time.

Student 5:

As tourism specialists, we have to see the different countries and their tourism practices, learn their citizens’ expectations, and follow the trends around the world. Erasmus provided me an opportunity to accomplish these objectives in Europe, as I had the chance to travel to various countries.

The Erasmus+ Program Guide (2014) states that improving intercultural awareness is a desired outcomes of the program. Based on the students’ statements, the program could be considered as successful in fulfilling this objective. Additionally, because of visa-related issues, economic reasons, and currency issues, it is neither affordable nor easy for Turkish students to
travel around the Europe for an extended time. Erasmus, for that reason, is considered an
goportunity by Turkish students to travel through the support of a funded program.

As a result, when the students are asked about various Erasmus experiences, they mainly
address either academic experiences or the experiences of their travels in Europe. Therefore, the
experience of Erasmus can be grouped as academic and travel-based for Turkish students.

4.2.2 Changes in learning expectations

Sandgren et al. (1999) stated that being exposed to a foreign culture causes significant
and permanent changes. These changes can be either in academic life or in the culture. This
statement is supported by the actual experiences and testimonials of the students who
participated in the Erasmus program. These students define the program as life changing and an
excellent opportunity for their academic and personal improvement as well as the career aspect
(European Commission, n.d.). Stilianos et al. (2013) stated the Erasmus program provides the
opportunity to experience a different education system and learning process. In this study,
consistent with the study of Stilianos et al. (2013), the students state that even though they did
not go with the mentioned expectation, during their study period they were fascinated by the
professors’ teaching methods at host institutions. Additionally, after coming back, they criticize
the education system in Turkey, which is mainly dominated by lecturers’ explanations during
class. A majority of students also criticize the test-based evaluation methods, as opposed to the
combination of project, presentations, assignments, and tests, which made them study just for a
grade and negatively impacts their learning. These critiques are expected consequences after the
students join study abroad programs. Cammelli (2001) stated that the students who have joined a
study abroad program become more critical about their home institution. According to Storti
(2001), returnees become critical and judgmental rather than being objective when they come back and remember the good things and forget the negative things in the host country. Consistent with the statement of the authors, participants of the study have some criticisms about their schools, and they say after experiencing new methods, they are not satisfied with the learning styles in their home institutions.

As a prime example of these learning styles, field trips in host countries are seen as a great opportunity for long-term learning. Four of the students stated that they participated in field trips in their host country and have never had these trips during their studies in Turkey.

Student 4:

_In Turkey, the professor says this is winter tourism and shows pictures from slides._

_However, in the host institution, they take you to a winter camp and you stay several days to see what winter tourism really is. We were visiting the museums and holding discussions about the actual museum trips. However, in Turkey, professors just talk about museums and never take us to museums to see how they operate. Or there we were going to tourism agencies and interacting with the personnel of the agency to see what is happening in the actual operations. I felt I really engaged in tourism that way. I would expect that kind of practice at Turkish universities._

Student 5:

_My expectation of my institution has changed. For example, now I am expecting field trips because I realized that it is a vital part of education there (at the host institution)._  
_For example, in the ecotourism class we spent almost half of the lectures in field trips. It became more fun not only for students but also for professors. When I came back to_
Turkey, the classes are all similar to each other. Just slides, pages of books to read, tests and so on.

Student 8:

*My school should change its teaching styles and should include field trips. For example, in our ecotourism class we went to zoos and forests, for our recreation class the professor took us to some sport events, etc. When you see something, you don’t forget it.*

After the field trip learning style, the project-and-discussion-based teaching style is the second different learning style addressed by participants. Two students mentioned that these methods foster creativity and critical thinking. Experiencing different teaching and learning styles and being involved in the learning process triggers critical thinking. Demir and Demir (2009) stated that critical thinking is one of the benefits of study abroad programs. Five students state they were highly involved in projects in the classes during their study abroad program, and this involvement made them think more critically, as they have to establish their own works in a unique way. All of these students state it was a better way of learning as opposed to the traditional way of evaluation only by tests.

A report by Caruana and Ploner (2011) stated that the extracurricular teaching and learning activities such as international field trips, international summer schools, and postgraduate conferences would be successful practices of internationalization, as they will improve students’ critical thinking abilities. Consistent with this statement, international or national trips, for example to learn about history in its original place, is another learning style that was perceived as different from their home institution. Students state that the schools they had been to have various study abroad programs in addition to the Erasmus program. Students state that
the students of host institutions have more opportunities to see different places and learn culture-based topics in their original locations.

When students were asked about the connection between international activities and tourism education, without exception every student mentioned that tourism education should include international activities to foster their education and learning. When asked the kind of activities they would expect, the answers were a variety of study abroad programs, partnerships among the programs, international professors, exchange of professors to see different teaching styles, and more exchange opportunities both for hosting international students and joining study abroad programs for the knowledge exchange of students.

Student 8:

Okay, our professors are helping us to find the internships and motivate us to participate in the Erasmus program; however, it should not be limited to Erasmus program. They should help us to find jobs in other countries. They should try to establish some agreements and partnerships with international companies for our job placement. Also, we have some international tourism professionals in our classes, but it would be perfect if my institution could arrange some international trips.

The report of Caruana and Ploner (2011) mentioned these successful practices and stated international graduate employment, international trips, international partnerships, and exchange programs are all examples of internationalization practices. Students also believe international opportunities should not be limited to the Erasmus program but be part of their higher education.
Student 6:

Tourism education should include international opportunities such as international internships and study abroad experiences, and study abroad should not be limited to the Erasmus program. Establishing a partnership and providing education two years in Turkey and two years abroad and eventually getting a degree from both schools would be beneficial for us and give us more international experience during our education as tourism major students.

Student 3:

It would be acceptable not to have any international experience for pharmacy or engineering major students. However, for a tourism major student, it is vital to see the circumstances abroad. It is considerably important to share and exchange knowledge and to establish an international network and connections.

These students’ suggestions are consistent with the various components of internationalization such as exchange of students, faculty and staff, international cooperation, and integrated curriculum as discussed in the literature (Waters, 2009; Jakson, 2008; Zhang et al., 2010; Schwald, 2012; Ayaun et al., 2010)

The study reveals that tourism major students are looking for more international opportunities than they currently have. They are also willing to experience various aspects of internationalization. It can be concluded that internationalization concepts should be researched more in depth for hospitality and tourism majors, as students believe international activities are vital for their field of study.
Mirici et al. (2009) stated that language learning is an important factor for academic success of exchange programs. Participants of the study address the same issue and state the language was a barrier preventing them from participating in discussions and other in-class activities. Only one participant of the study mentioned his sufficient English language level.

Student 3:

My English language level was sufficient to participate in the program and go abroad.

The other eight participants in the study intend to practice and improve their language skills. This insufficient English level, or students’ doubts about their language level, might prevent them from getting the maximum academic benefits.

Language is one expectation of these eight students from the program because participants believe the way of teaching language in Turkey is very grammar based and is not useful in communicating abroad. Therefore, the students are expecting a different language teaching style that is based on more practice from their institutions. The paradox is although a great number of students state that one of the reasons to participate in the program is improving their language skills, the English tests, both written and oral, are a pre-requisite of the program, and if their language level is not sufficient, the students cannot enter the program. Therefore, any single student who wants to join the program must pass the English test. Although their English language level is satisfactory to pass the exam, they all intend to improve their language. Their main purpose should be interpreted as improvement of their speaking skills rather than grammar. As a matter of fact, four students said the language classes in Turkey are very grammar focused and their grammar is sufficient, but speaking skills are not as satisfactory as grammar skills. Additionally, students state that grammar is not as useful as speaking to communicate abroad.
Student 6:

*When we are asked to write an essay, Turkish students are far better than any other students in the class because grammar is the main component of our classes in Turkey. Therefore, we know the rules and write better essays than any other international student in the class. Turkish students were the best in terms of writing skills. However, when it comes to discussing a topic or giving a presentation or stating an opinion, instantly Turkish students were the worst. For that reason, at the beginning, until having confidence, the Turkish students in my class were not participating in the class and could not take part in the discussion.*

The students expect different methods to learn language since their experience with the way they are taught in Turkey is not working and does not allow them to communicate and integrate to the community when they go abroad.

As a result, field trips, project-and-discussion-based classes, national and international trips, a variety of exchange programs, and English classes that focus on speaking practice are the themes that students address about rising expectations in their learning environment.

**4.2.3 Effects of study abroad on their culture**

After experiencing new cultures, students state that they are mainly affected by various lifestyles and people’s behavior. They also state that they try to keep similar lifestyles in Turkey.

Student 4:

*When I visited Spain, I noticed that their eating habits are totally different from Turkish people. They are eating their meals as entertainment. They enjoy it. When I was there, I*
also started eating in that way. I got used to spending a long time cooking and eating as it is relaxation. That’s why I kept the same habit for a long time here in Turkey.

Student 5:

In Spain they are extroverted and friendly. When they see other people, they say hi even though they do not know each other. I noticed it is really very polite and pleasant. I start doing the same thing in Turkey, but as you know it is not common here. People are surprised when I do that.

Student 1:

The main purpose of hospitality and tourism education is accommodating different people from diverse backgrounds and nationalities. Therefore, you should know their cultures very well and be open to their different expectations caused by different cultures. After the Erasmus program, I became more open minded and more tolerant of other cultures, and I started to understand some differences between cultures that I could not have been understood otherwise. I can say that Erasmus also impacted my culture, as I am more tolerated after the program.

Student 4:

My approach to different cultures has changed. Now I try to understand all people without any stereotypes and biases.

Student 2:

Our culture is not tolerant by its nature. Neither was I. For example, before Erasmus, when I heard that a person is atheist, I would try to keep away from him and I would
define him as “he has no god” and it seemed to me unbelievable and unacceptable. I would ignore them and refuse to form a relationship with them. However, when I was there, I had some atheist friends and had a chance to know them closer. I realized they are human like you and I, even better than you and I.

When the statements of students are examined, it can be seen that the main cultural impact is eliminating stereotypes and being more tolerant. Some stereotypes in the culture impact perceptions of people and result in limited tolerance. Without seeing new cultures or practices of these cultures in their original place, students are judging these cultures based on the information they gather from various secondary data. According to the findings of the study, the program impacts students as it provides a chance to observe cultures and people in their own environment together with other components of culture such as geography, lifestyles, and circumstances.

Four participants compared the home and host countries and conclude that Turkey has better economic conditions. However, they state that the lifestyle of people in the host country is better in terms of their enjoyment of life. They state it is the manner of European culture, and they try to have a more relaxed and peaceful life after returning to Turkey.

Student 9:

*They are relaxed and friendly and enjoy their lives. It has nothing to do with their economic condition because I believe that in Turkey we have better economic conditions than Poland. However, they have better social conditions than we have in Turkey.*
Student 2:

*In Turkey just rich people go out and enjoy. The others stay at home. Entertainment is seen as the activity of rich people only. However, in Poland anyone can go out and have fun. There are no differences between people in terms of entertainment opportunities.*

It can be concluded that the students are culturally affected by the program and realize that entertainment and the joy of life should be considered separately from economic conditions.

As a result, in terms of cultural impacts, being tolerant, eliminating stereotypes and biases, and being open-minded are the themes that emerged during the interviews. In addition, students noticed that, although social conditions and entertainment opportunities are perceived as closely connected to economic conditions, they really are not related to one another.

**4.2.4 Impact on the classroom**

After the Erasmus program, students addressed specific themes about their perceptions of successful teaching and learning styles in their learning environments.

The interaction in the classroom is one of the main points that many Erasmus students pointed out. Şahin (2013) stated that 84% of the students in the study believed they have active roles, and participation is important for interaction and learning in the classroom. In his study, İşeri (2005) searched for opinions of participants about the practices of the Erasmus program, and one of the participants (a former study abroad student) stated that although the Turkish lecturer had a similar teaching style, students were participating in the lecture at the host institution and that class is more interactive than classes in Turkey. Participants were impressed
with the style of teaching abroad because of the active student participation (Tekin & Gencer, 2013).

Similar to the studies mentioned above, in this study five students mentioned the participation and active role of the students in the classroom as a more effective learning method. Students state that classes in Turkey are professor-oriented, whereas they are student-oriented in their host institutions.

Student 5:

*I believe they are better than us in terms of teaching styles. Here (in Turkey) the professors just talk, show the slides, and leave the class. In my school during Erasmus, professors were just leading the class but it was the students’ class. So, you should contribute to the class for better learning. Even if you don’t want to speak, professors encourage you to talk, no matter how low your English level is.*

Student 6:

*You also take responsibility of the class together with the professor. You participate, you discuss, and you prepare some presentations... It is not an environment where the teacher is teaching and students are learning. Instead, teachers and students are learning together. The professors are more constructive. Even though you make some mistakes or you have language problems, they all try to help you. In Turkey, professors assign you pages of readings for the exams; however, there (at the host institution) they assign you the topic and it is your responsibility to research the sources and find your own sources and are on your own to learn the topic.*
Students’ emphasis on participation could be explained by the professor-oriented teaching style in Turkish universities. The theoretical structure also could be the reason that decreased participation and contribution occurs in the classroom. However, with classes based on practices abroad, the participation and contribution of each student is necessary and appreciated.

As a second impact on the classroom, the population theme is one of the points made by the participants. They stated the lower population could help create a more effective learning environment in the classroom as it would enable professors to pay more attention to individual students. The participant of similar studies also addressed the population of the classes as one of the differences in the learning environments between Turkey and their host institution (Şahin, 2013; Özdem, 2013; İşeri, 2005). Five participants in this study made the point by saying that because of the low number of students in the classroom, the professor could be more interested in students or students can have more classroom discussion sessions at their host institutions. However, four participants of the study stated that host institutions had different classes for Erasmus students or they were taking classes in English, which were not of high interest from domestic students. The low number of students in the classroom can be explained by the nature of the Erasmus program, since the majority of students took separated classes or preferred the classes taught in English. Şahin (2013) stated that in order to improve the quality of education by cultural exchange, Erasmus, the exchange program funded by EU, has great importance. However, based on the findings of the study, some institutions offered classes just for Erasmus students and did not provide opportunities for mixed classes with domestic students. As a result, the cultural exchange interactions were limited to other international students even though the low population is seen as an advantage at host schools.
The evaluation process also was addressed by the participants of the study as an effective impact on the learning process. Students state they were impressed by the format of the evaluation of academic success in host institutions. According to students’ statements, the evaluation was mainly based on various activities such as in-class discussions, projects, assignments, take-home exams, and presentations as opposed to test-based evaluation in Turkey. Şahin (2013) found 74% of sample study participants stated that the evaluation process included the whole process rather than one single evaluation instrument. This situation shows that the evaluation in the host institutions is process oriented in contrast to being result oriented. A participant of İsher’s (2005) study addressed the same point and said evaluation of students was mainly based on assignments and projects, and they did not have as many exams as they do in Turkey. Thus, students were doing the assignments and projects without the pressure and stress of the grade.

In conclusion, participation, low student class population, and the evaluation process that includes various parameters are the themes that students perceive as beneficial for the learning environment. According to the students, all these concepts would increase the learning outcomes and help them retain the information for a longer time and apply it to real life situations in the industry.

4.2.5 Re-entry and adjustment of students

The participants were asked about their re-entry process and to evaluate their adaptation process after Erasmus. Although they experienced some difficulties in terms of academic and cultural life in Turkey, they stated they did not experience a strong re-entry or reverse culture shock. The reason can be explained in two ways. The first reason could be their unfamiliarity
with the term, because some students state that the process of coming back was difficult and they did experience some problems. However, students did not explain it as a reverse culture shock. The second explanation could be their perception about the Erasmus program. The students consider the program as an opportunity for extraordinary travel and for that reason do not get attached to the host institution and host country. Sussman (1986) stated that if the students are well adapted to the host country, they would experience stronger reverse culture shock. The participants of the study stated they spent the time travelling to other countries, and these travels might have prevented them from adapting to the host country. As a result, they might not experience reverse culture shock in Turkey.

In the study of Sancak (2009), 44% of students experienced adaptation problem and 22% had strong adaptation problems, whereas 32% stated they did not have any adaptation problems. In the study, reverse culture shock, differences between the teaching methods, and language problems (speaking a foreign language for a long time) were the three reasons students pointed out among 11 total reasons.

Four students in this study state it was hard to come back and get used to life in their home country.

Student 5:

*It was hard to adjust here (Turkey) even though I did not have any problem in terms of my relation with my friends, family, and professors. When I saw the social life and entertainment there, the ones in Turkey started to seem very basic and simple. I said to myself; I used to live in these conditions, which were more basic than I experienced during my Erasmus life.*
Student 6:

I was not ready to come back. I had a really good time and made really good friends. Okay, I am from Turkey but after experiencing something better, it is really hard to come back. In Turkey, you cannot keep doing the same things that you were doing there. I want to speak about my Erasmus experience; however, I am thinking I am bothering my friends. Sometimes, I come together with some former Erasmus students and I enjoy the time. We generally speak about our Erasmus experiences.

Student 9:

I came back three months ago and I still look at my pictures, have my memories about the host country. It was so easy to go any other European country when I was in Europe. Now, it is almost impossible. I cannot go and visit these countries that easy. Before Erasmus, I never thought about working abroad. However, now I definitely want to go and work abroad. Although I kept in touch with my friend in Turkey while I was there, now I feel we have some gaps in our conversations. I realized that when I come together with some people who have abroad experience, we spontaneously start speaking about our abroad experiences. I also spent 80% of my interview by talking about my Erasmus experience before I got my current job.

Student 8:

I feel I cannot live in Turkey anymore after experiencing the life abroad because I used to live with open minded people. For example, in Turkey people are more conservative and they can consider your clothes as strange if it is an uncommon style. If you have a
behavior which is not common, it can be considered as unacceptable by the society.

Therefore, I cannot stay here anymore.

The reasons for these difficulties are generally related to the different lifestyles. After experiencing a temporary life in Europe, students have some adjustment problems in Turkey, as the country has a different culture and values than European countries.

Five students state they did not experience re-entry problem or post-Erasmus syndrome. Cohen (2003) stated the life of students before going to study abroad might affect the re-entry process. According to the author, the students who have a more difficult re-entry than other respondents in the study were not happy with their lives before going to study abroad. In this study students who stated they did not have re-entry shock did state they had already missed their friends, families, social lives, and the culture of food. It might be conclude that even the students who were very satisfied with the Erasmus experience also were satisfied with their social environment in Turkey with close connections with family and friends. Therefore, they did not experience re-entry shock. Storti (2001) stated that returning back created the feeling of starting over as people, places, and ways of life seemed strange in this returning stage. However, there is another idea from study of Cohen (2003), as the author stated that being academically busy after coming back to the home institution can help decrease the reverse culture effect. Returning to their schools and studies might be the reason participants did not experience strong reverse culture shock.

However, Cohen (2003) also stated that one sign of re-entry shock is the desire to go back to the host country. For this study, five participants state they definitely want to go back to the host country for their higher education, and three want to continue their career abroad.
Overall, of the nine students, eight would like to go back to other countries. Based on this finding, it might be concluded that students experience re-entry shock even though they do not recognize it as re-entry shock since it is not a common term to them, or re-entry shock may require some professional help. However, their plans about going back to abroad matches the re-entry shock indicators of Cohen’s study (2003).
Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This study has examined the impacts of study abroad opportunities on international students and re-entry process of these students after studying abroad. The findings from this study make several contributions to the current literature.

First, the study has shown that students are not participating in the program for academic purposes. The new culture, language, and travel opportunities are the main motivators. However, after returning home, a majority of the students want to pursue their higher education abroad and seek a variety of study abroad opportunities. Therefore, academic impacts of study abroad programs should be the subject of further studies since it is one of the main impacts of the programs based on students’ opinions. In addition, the Turkish institutions should integrate their education styles to the other learning styles that are common in the international market and follow the trends of internationalization practices to prepare these students to further their education.

Second, this study has found that one of the barriers for the internationalization of education is the language problem. Students are addressing either their own insufficient language levels or the professors’ insufficient language levels as a communication barrier during their study abroad period. Therefore, the language teaching methods should be modified based on requirements of the market.

The third major finding was that, students are in separated classes as international Erasmus students and are given more flexibility and leniency than domestic students. This
situation could hinder their academic benefits from the program. This different approach to Erasmus students makes them interact with other European students but prevents them from interacting with domestic students at the host institution. This situation could prevent their exposure to the local teaching and learning environment and make them participate in an artificial environment that is prepared specifically for international students.

One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that, after the study abroad period, expectations from the home institution increase because the students now have experienced various learning environments and styles of teaching and evaluation. In order to accommodate the students who return from abroad, institutions and professors should be ready to understand and satisfy their needs and expectations.

Finally, the study has shown that students state some difficulties about their re-entry process; however, do not explain these difficulties as re-entry shock. Feeling uncomfortable in their home culture or trying to find other people who have abroad experience are examples of these difficulties. This situation could be explained by their unfamiliarity with the terms re-entry or reverse culture shock. Therefore, the situation requires more attention and more in-depth research.

However, the generalizability of these results is subject to certain limitations. For instance, the study was conducted with nine former Erasmus participants. Although the number could be considered proper for qualitative methods, the larger sample could reveal more comprehensive findings. In addition, the study did evaluate the impacts of the program on students that are studying hospitality and tourism management. Students from different majors...
could feel the impacts in various ways. The current investigation was also limited by Turkish students. Students from different nationalities would have been affected in different ways.

5.2 Recommendations for future studies

After conducting a study on the impacts of study abroad opportunities on international students majoring in tourism and hospitality, it is suggested that the association of the following factors is investigated in future studies not only to reveal the other impacts that are not revealed in this study but also to have a deeper understanding about study abroad programs:

1. Future research can be conducted with a larger sample than this study’s sample.

Nine students participated in the current study. Although the number could be considered sufficient for qualitative method, a higher sample number could provide more in-depth information or additional themes about study abroad programs and their impact.

2. Further research might be duplicated with a sample selected from a private university.

The current study was conducted with a sample from a state university. As the study addresses the academic aspect, private and state universities could exhibit some differences in terms of academic satisfaction and expectations. Thus, the impacts on the students and the changes in their expectations can be different in private universities and state universities. For that reason, conducting a study in private universities could result with different findings.

3. Further research could compare the impacts of the Erasmus program on students at Turkish universities and other universities abroad under the Erasmus program.
The study was conducted with students from a university in Turkey and the answers are closely connected to personality, values, traditions, and culture. Students from different cultures could react differently to the same experience. Thus, conducting the same study with students from universities in other European countries could be beneficial to gather more insightful and comparable data.

4. Further studies need to examine other study abroad programs.

This study’s sample was chosen from former Erasmus program students. The Erasmus program, the most common, accessible, and available study abroad program in Turkish higher education, was the focus of the study. Other programs and study abroad opportunities could result in different findings depending on the time period or different conditions of the programs.

5. Another possible area of future research would be conducting the study through focus groups.

This study used semi-structured interviews to collect the qualitative data. Although it was a proper way to collect the data based on the study objectives and similar studies, and the study concluded with satisfactory findings, the focus group method would be sufficient to see the interaction among former Erasmus student and how their interaction would impact their expressions of ideas about the program.

6. Further studies can collect data through face-to-face interviews.

As the researcher and sample are located different countries, the interviews were conducted through Skype or phone calls that might have inhibited students’
expression of feelings. As stated above, the study’s objectives are closely connected to feelings. In order to observe and analyze these feelings, further studies could use face-to-face interviews.
References


Association Web site. Retrieved from


1009842160?accountid=108

http://www.islamicstudiesnetwork.ac.uk/assets/documents/subjects/hlst/vol6no2_bologna_process.pdf


https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/tezSorguSonucYeni.jsp


*Intercultural Education, 13*(1), 81-95. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14675980120112968


Appendix A

Turkish version of the interview

1. Neden Erasmus programına katıldınız?
2. Oradaki vaktinizi nasıl değerlendirdiniz?
3. Nasıl bir deneyimdi?
4. Türkiye ve gittiğiniz ülkeyi kıyaslar mınsınız?
5. Erasmus programının sizin üzerinde ne gibi etkileri olduğunu düşündüyorsunuz?
6. Dönüş sürecinizi nasıl değerlendiriyorsunuz?
7. Bu ve benzeri uluslararası faaliyetlerin turizm eğitimi ile bağlantısını nasıl değerlendiriyorsunuz?
Appendix B

English version of the interview

1. Why did you participate in Erasmus program?
2. How did you spend your time in the host country?
3. Overall how was your experience?
4. Can you please compare Turkey and the country where you went?
5. What kind of impact does Erasmus program have on you?
6. How would you evaluate the returning process?
7. What do you think about the relation between Erasmus or similar international activities and tourism education?
Appendix C

Turkish version of the survey

Değerli Erasmus öğrencisi,

Ben Seza Zerman, şu anda Rochester Institute of Technology’de Turizm İşletmeciliği alanında yüksek lisansımı tamamlıyorum. Şu anda, Erasmus deneyiminin geçmiş katılımcılar üzerindeki etkilerini araştırmaktayım. Tez araştıramım yüksek lisans mezuniyetimin gerekliliklerinin son aşaması olduğu için, sizden bu ankete katılmanızı rica ediyorum. Tüm bilgiler gizli tutulacak ve sadece akademik amaçlı kullanılacaktır. Anket, yaklaşık 5 dakika sürmektedir. Anketle ilgili herhangi bir sorunuz olursa lütfen beni aramaktan ya da bana e-mail atmaktan çekinmeyin.

1. Erasmus programına hangi yıl katıldınız?
   a. 2013
   b. 2012
   c. 2011
   d. 2010
   e. 2010’dan önce

2. Erasmus programınız hangi ülkede gerçekleşti?

3. Erasmus’a kaç dönem boyunca katıldınız?
   a. 1
   b. 2
   c. 3
d. 4

e. 4 dönemden daha fazla

4. Erasmus süresince bölümünüz ne idi?

5. Şu anda kaçıncı sınıftasınız?
   a. 1
   b. 2
   c. 3
   d. 4
   e. Lisansüstü

6. Erasmus öncesi, akademik amaçlarla hiç yurtdışında bulundunuz mu?
   a. Evet
   b. Hayır

7. Eğer bulunduysanız, akademik amaçlı yurtdışında geçirdiğiniz en uzun süre ne kadardı?

8. Eğer bulunduysanız, akademik amaçlı en uzun süreyi geçirdiğiniz ülke hangisiydi?

9. Erasmus öncesi, turist olarak yurtdışında bulundunuz mu?
   a. Evet
   b. Hayır

10. Eğer bulunduysanız, turist olarak yurtdışında geçirdiğiniz en uzun süre ne kadardı?

11. Eğer bulunduysanız, turist olarak en uzun süreyi geçirdiğiniz ülke hangisiydi?
12. Erasmus’a katılmayı seçmekteki ana amacınız neydi? (Bir tane seçiniz)
   a. Akademik (kendi ülkeniz dışında bir ülkede eğitim almak)
   b. Kültürel (yeni bir yabancı ülke deneyimi yaşamak)
   c. Kişisel (Yabancı dil, özgüven ve gelecekteki kariyer vb açılarından kendimi geliştirmek)
   d. Diğer, lütfen belirtiniz

13. Erasmustan nasıl haberdar oldunuz?
   a. Arkadaşından
   b. Hocalarımдан
   c. Aile üyelerinden
   d. İnternetten
   e. Okulumun uluslararası ofisinden
   f. Diğer, lütfen belirtiniz


15. Cinsiyetiniz?
   a. Kadın
   b. Erkek

16. Doğum tarihiniz?
Appendix D

English version of the survey

Dear former Erasmus student,

My name is Seza Zerman and I am writing my thesis at Rochester Institute of Technology, Hospitality and Tourism major. I am currently searching the impacts of the Erasmus program on former participants. As the research is the final requirement of my graduation, I kindly ask you to participate in this survey. All the information will be kept confidential and will only be used for academic purposes. The survey takes approximately five minutes. If you have any questions about the survey, please feel free to call or e-mail me.

1. When did you participate in Erasmus program?
   a. 2013
   b. 2012
   c. 2011
   d. 2010
   e. Before 2010

2. In which country did your Erasmus experience take place?

3. For how many semesters did you stay abroad with the program?
   a. 1
   b. 2
   c. 3
   d. 4
   e. More than 4 semesters
4. What was your major that you studied during Erasmus period?

5. What is your current year at school?
   a. 1
   b. 2
   c. 3
   d. 4
   e. Graduate

6. Have you ever been abroad for academic purposes before Erasmus?
   a. Yes
   b. No

7. If yes, what was the longest time that you spent abroad for academic purposes?

8. If yes, what was the country that you had been to for academic purposes?

9. Have you ever been abroad for touristic purposes before Erasmus?
   a. Yes
   b. No

10. If yes, what was the longest time that you spent abroad for tourism purposes?

11. If yes, what was the country that you have been to for tourism purposes?

12. What was your main motivation to participate in Erasmus program?
    (Choose one)
13. How did you hear about Erasmus?
   a. From my friends
   b. From my professors
   c. From family members
   d. From the Internet
   e. From the international office of my school
   f. Other, please specify.

14. In order to have deeper information about your Erasmus experience, I would like to conduct an interview with you. If you would like to participate, please leave your e-mail to set up the time for the interview. This interview will be considerably important to achieve the study objectives.

15. What is your gender?
   a. Female
   b. Male

16. What is your date of birth?