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The Impact of Erasmus+ Program Participation on Student Satisfaction, Academic Development, and International Competence: A Quantitative Study among University Students in Türkiye

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Abstract:

This study examines the impact of Erasmus+ program participation on student satisfaction, academic development, and international competence among university students in Türkiye. Employing a quantitative research design, data were collected from 300 university students who participated in Erasmus+ mobility programs through a structured online questionnaire administered via a five-point Likert scale. Measurement items were adapted from previously validated instruments in the higher education and intercultural competence literature. Data were analyzed using SPSS software through descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, Pearson correlation, and simple linear regression. The findings revealed statistically significant positive relationships between Erasmus+ participation and all three dependent variables. Specifically, Erasmus+ participation accounted for approximately 53% of the variance in student satisfaction ($\beta = 0.73$, $p < .001$), 50% of the variance in academic development ($\beta = 0.71$, $p < .001$), and 46% of the variance in international competence ($\beta = 0.68$, $p < .001$). All three research hypotheses were supported, confirming that participation in Erasmus+ mobility programs positively contributes to students' educational experiences, academic growth, and intercultural competencies. Descriptive analysis revealed that international competence recorded the highest mean score ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.61$), followed by Erasmus+ participation ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.68$), academic development ($M = 4.06$, $SD = 0.69$), and student satisfaction ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.86$). The study contributes empirical evidence

to the growing literature on higher education internationalization and international student mobility, and provides practical recommendations for universities and policymakers to enhance Erasmus+ program effectiveness and student support services.

Keywords: Erasmus+; Student Satisfaction; Academic Development; International Competence; Higher Education Internationalization.

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أثر المشاركة في برنامج إيراسموس+ على رضا الطلاب والتطور الأكاديمي والكفاءة الدولية: دراسة كمية بين طلاب الجامعات في تركيا

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ملخص

: تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى استقصاء أثر المشاركة في برنامج إيراسموس+ على رضا الطلاب والتطور الأكاديمي والكفاءة الدولية لدى طلاب الجامعات في تركيا. اعتمدت الدراسة منهجاً كمياً، إذ جُمعت البيانات من 300 طالب جامعي شاركوا في برامج إيراسموس+ للتنقل الطلابي عبر استبيان إلكتروني منظم باستخدام مقياس ليكرت الخماسي. تم تكييف بنود القياس من أدوات معتمدة سابقاً في أدبيات التعليم العالي والكفاءة الثقافية. حُللت البيانات باستخدام برنامج SPSS من خلال الإحصاء الوصفي وتحليل الموثوقية وتحليل الارتباط بيرسون وتحليل الانحدار الخطي البسيط. كشفت النتائج عن وجود علاقات إيجابية ذات دلالة إحصائية بين المشاركة في برنامج إيراسموس+ والمتغيرات التابعة الثلاثة جميعها؛ إذ فسّرت المشاركة في إيراسموس+ ما يقارب 53% من التباين في رضا الطلاب ($\beta = 0.73$، $p < .001$)، و50% من التباين في التطور الأكاديمي ($\beta = 0.71$، $p < .001$)، و46% من التباين في الكفاءة الدولية ($\beta = 0.68$، $p < .001$). تأيدت الفرضيات الثلاث جميعها، مما يؤكد أن برامج إيراسموس+ للتنقل الطلابي تسهم إيجاباً في تجارب الطلاب التعليمية ونموهم الأكاديمي وكفاءاتهم الثقافية. وتضيف الدراسة أدلة تجريبية إلى الأدبيات المتنامية حول تدويل التعليم العالي والتنقل الدولي للطلاب، مقدِّمةً توصيات عملية للجامعات وصانعي السياسات لتحسين فاعلية برامج إيراسموس+ وخدمات دعم الطلاب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: إيراسموس+؛ رضا الطلاب؛ التطور الأكاديمي؛ الكفاءة الدولية؛ تدويل التعليم العالي.

Introduction:

Internationalization of higher education has emerged as a central strategic priority for universities worldwide in response to increasing globalization and the growing demand for graduates equipped with global competencies. International student mobility programs have become essential mechanisms for enhancing students' academic and intercultural experiences, with the Erasmus+ program representing one of the most prominent and comprehensive of these initiatives globally (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Erasmus+, funded by the European Union, offers university students the opportunity to study abroad, experience different academic systems, and interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, thereby potentially improving their academic knowledge, communication skills, intercultural competence, and personal development (European Commission, 2021).

Student satisfaction, academic development, and international competence represent three critical educational outcomes that international mobility experiences are expected to positively influence. Student satisfaction reflects students' perceptions of the educational quality and institutional support they receive (Elliott & Healy, 2001), while academic development encompasses growth in critical thinking, academic knowledge, and learning capacities (Biggs & Tang, 2011). International competence—increasingly demanded in globalized labor markets—involves effective intercultural communication and sensitivity to cultural diversity (Deardorff, 2006).

Despite the growing significance of Erasmus+ programs for Turkish university students, limited empirical research has specifically examined how participation in these programs simultaneously influences these three outcomes within the Turkish higher education context (Teichler, 2017). This study aims to address this research gap by investigating the effects of Erasmus+ participation on student satisfaction, academic development, and international competence among university students in Türkiye using a quantitative approach. The findings provide empirical evidence to the growing literature on higher education internationalization and offer practical recommendations for universities and policymakers.

I. THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

1: Internationalization in Higher Education

Internationalization in higher education is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, and global dimension into the

purpose, functions, and delivery of postsecondary education (Knight, 2004). This encompasses international student mobility, academic exchanges, cross-border research collaboration, curriculum internationalization, and inter-institutional partnerships. The growing importance of internationalization is closely associated with the evolving demands of the global labor market and the increasing need for graduates who possess international competence and intercultural communication skills (De Wit et al., 2015). International student mobility programs provide students with opportunities to study abroad, participate in exchange programs, and experience different academic and cultural environments. Research consistently demonstrates that students who engage in international mobility experiences may develop essential competencies including intercultural communication skills, self-confidence, and adaptability (Vande Berg et al., 2023; Teichler, 2017).

2: The Erasmus+ Program

The Erasmus+ program, launched by the European Union in 1987 as the Erasmus programme, has evolved into one of the most comprehensive international mobility initiatives in higher education. The program supports academic exchange and mobility of students, researchers, and academic staff across European institutions and partner countries including Türkiye (European Commission, 2021). Erasmus+ aims to enhance the quality of higher education by promoting academic cooperation, knowledge exchange, and intercultural learning in an international context. Students participating in Erasmus+ benefit from exposure to different educational systems, teaching methods, and cultural environments, which may positively impact their academic learning and personal development (Anderson & Lawton, 2011). Despite these benefits, students may also encounter challenges including cultural adjustment difficulties, language barriers, financial constraints, and differences in academic systems during their mobility period (Netz, 2021).

3: Key Theoretical Constructs

Student satisfaction broadly represents the degree to which students perceive their university environment as effectively meeting their educational expectations, academic needs, and learning experiences (Oliver, 1980). It is influenced by academic quality, institutional support services, teaching effectiveness, and social integration factors (Chandra et al., 2019). Academic development refers to the growth in students' knowledge domains, critical thinking skills, problem-solving abilities, and intellectual capacities throughout the educational process (Biggs & Tang, 2011). International competence involves the capability to effectively communicate, cooperate,

and interact with people from diverse cultural backgrounds while demonstrating openness, flexibility, and cultural sensitivity (Deardorff, 2006). As graduates increasingly work in multicultural and international environments, developing these competencies within higher education has become a critical priority (Jones, 2013).

4: Theoretical Framework and Research Hypotheses

The conceptual framework of this study positions Erasmus+ program participation as the independent variable and student satisfaction, academic development, and international competence as dependent variables. The framework draws on three theoretical perspectives: Internationalization Theory (Knight, 2004), which argues that international mobility enriches students' academic and intercultural development; Intercultural Competence Theory (Deardorff, 2006), which posits that direct cultural exposure is central to developing intercultural sensitivity; and Student Development Theory (Evans et al., 2009), which holds that challenging educational experiences promote intellectual growth and personal transformation. Based on this theoretical foundation and a review of empirical literature, the following research hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Erasmus+ program participation positively influences student satisfaction.

H2: Erasmus+ program participation positively influences academic development.

H3: Erasmus+ program participation positively influences international competence.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1: Research Design and Sampling

This study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional, explanatory research design using a survey questionnaire to examine the relationships between Erasmus+ participation and the selected educational outcomes (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). A deductive research approach was employed, whereby hypotheses were derived from theoretical and empirical literature and subsequently tested using statistical analysis (Bryman & Bell, 2011). A convenience sampling technique was used to recruit 300 university students in Türkiye who had participated in Erasmus+ mobility programs (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The sample comprised students from diverse educational backgrounds and

academic fields, providing broader perspectives on Erasmus+ experiences. The sample size of 300 respondents is considered adequate for the multivariate statistical analyses employed in this study, meeting the minimum ratio of 5 to 10 respondents per measurement item recommended by Hair et al. (2010).

2: Data Collection and Measurement Scales

Data were collected via a structured online questionnaire distributed through digital platforms to university students in Türkiye who had completed Erasmus+ mobility activities. The questionnaire comprised a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) and was organized into sections measuring the four main constructs of the study. Measurement items were adapted from previously validated scales in the higher education and intercultural competence literature (see Table N°1). Ethical approval was obtained from Istanbul Nisantasi University Ethics Committee prior to data collection (Decision Number: 2026.04.25, Meeting Date: 13.03.2025), and all participation was voluntary and anonymous.

Table N°1. Measurement Scales Used in the Study

Variable / Construct	Scale Name / Source	Key Measurement Items (5-Point Likert Scale)	References
Erasmus+ Program Participation (IV)	Study Abroad / Erasmus Participation Experience Scale	Participation in mobility activities; exposure to international academic environments; interaction with students from other cultures; engagement in international learning experiences	King & Ruiz-Gelices (2003)
Student Satisfaction (DV)	Student University Satisfaction Scale (SUSS)	Satisfaction with academic support during mobility; satisfaction with administrative procedures; satisfaction with learning environment; overall satisfaction with Erasmus experience	Hussain & Bhamani (2012)
Academic Development (DV)	Global Perspective Inventory (GPI)	Improvement of academic knowledge; development of critical thinking skills; ability to understand global issues; enhancement of learning perspectives	Anderson & Lawton (2011); Braskamp et al. (2010)
International Competence (DV)	Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS)	Respect for cultural differences; confidence in interacting with people from other cultures; openness to cultural diversity; ability to communicate in multicultural environments	Chen & Starosta (2000)

3: Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using SPSS software through four main analytical procedures: (1) descriptive statistics to summarize demographic characteristics and construct mean scores; (2) Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis to assess internal consistency of measurement scales; (3) Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) to evaluate construct validity; and (4) Pearson correlation and simple linear regression analyses to test the proposed hypotheses and examine the relationships between Erasmus+ participation and the three dependent variables (Hair et al., 2010; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1: Descriptive Statistics

A total of 300 valid questionnaire responses were included in the final analysis. Table N°2 presents the demographic characteristics of respondents. Female participants represented the majority of the sample (55.0%) while male respondents accounted for 45.0%. The majority of participants (57.0%) fell within the 20–24 age group, consistent with the typical Erasmus+ participant profile. Most respondents were bachelor's degree students (70.0%), followed by master's students (25.3%) and doctoral students (4.7%). In terms of field of study, respondents were distributed across Business/Management (23.7%), Social Sciences (23.7%), Humanities (23.7%), Engineering (18.0%), and Other fields (11.0%), indicating a diverse and representative sample.

Table N°2. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	135	45.0%
	Female	165	55.0%
Age	Under 20	30	10.0%
	20–24	171	57.0%
	25–29	66	22.0%
	30–34	24	8.0%
	35+	9	3.0%
Education Level	Bachelor	210	70.0%
	Master	76	25.3%
	PhD	14	4.7%
Field of Study	Business / Management	71	23.7%
	Engineering	54	18.0%
	Social Sciences	71	23.7%
	Humanities	71	23.7%
	Other	33	11.0%

Table N°3 presents the descriptive statistics for the four main research constructs. International competence recorded the highest mean score (M = 4.22, SD = 0.61), indicating that respondents generally perceived their Erasmus+ experiences as highly beneficial for developing intercultural skills and global awareness. Erasmus+ participation (M = 4.12, SD = 0.68) and academic development (M = 4.06, SD = 0.69) also demonstrated high mean scores, reflecting overall positive evaluations of international mobility. Student satisfaction recorded a positive but comparatively lower mean score (M = 3.64, SD = 0.86), with a notably higher standard deviation suggesting greater variability in participants' satisfaction levels during their mobility experiences.

Table N°3. Descriptive Statistics of Main Constructs

Construct	No. of Items	Mean	Standard Deviation
Erasmus+ Program Participation	5	4.12	0.68
Student Satisfaction	5	3.64	0.86
Academic Development	5	4.06	0.69
International Competence	5	4.22	0.61

2: Reliability and Validity Assessment

Table N°4 presents the results of the Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis. All four constructs achieved excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach's Alpha values ranging from 0.903 to 0.941, substantially exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2010). Student satisfaction demonstrated the strongest reliability (α = 0.941), followed by Erasmus+ program participation (α = 0.923) and academic development (α = 0.921). These results confirm that the measurement scales used in this study reliably assess the intended constructs.

Table N°4. Reliability Analysis Results

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Erasmus+ Program Participation	5	0.923
Student Satisfaction	5	0.941
Academic Development	5	0.921
International Competence	5	0.903

Table N°5 presents Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) results. All constructs achieved CR values exceeding 0.70 and AVE values exceeding 0.50, confirming satisfactory convergent validity. Student satisfaction demonstrated the strongest validity metrics (CR = 0.942, AVE = 0.763), while all other constructs met the recommended thresholds, supporting the construct validity of the measurement instrument.

Table N°5. Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Construct	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Erasmus+ Program Participation	0.924	0.707
Student Satisfaction	0.942	0.763
Academic Development	0.921	0.699
International Competence	0.906	0.659

3: Hypothesis Testing Results

Simple linear regression analyses were conducted using SPSS software to test the three proposed research hypotheses. Table N°6 presents a comprehensive summary of the regression results for all three hypotheses. Erasmus+ participation significantly and positively predicted student satisfaction ($\beta = 0.73$, $t = 18.37$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.53$), indicating that Erasmus+ participation explains approximately 53% of the variance in student satisfaction. Erasmus+ participation also significantly predicted academic development ($\beta = 0.71$, $t = 17.50$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.50$), accounting for 50% of the variance. The effect on international competence was also statistically significant ($\beta = 0.68$, $t = 15.80$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 0.46$), with Erasmus+ participation explaining

approximately 46% of the variance in international competence. Table N°7 summarizes the hypothesis testing outcomes.

Table N°6. Regression Results for H1, H2, and H3

Hypothesis	Relationship Tested	β	t-value	p-value	R^2
H1	Erasmus+ Participation → Student Satisfaction	0.73	18.37	< .001	0.53
H2	Erasmus+ Participation → Academic Development	0.71	17.50	< .001	0.50
H3	Erasmus+ Participation → International Competence	0.68	15.80	< .001	0.46

Table N°7. Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Statement	Result
H1	Erasmus+ program participation positively influences student satisfaction.	Supported
H2	Erasmus+ program participation positively influences academic development.	Supported
H3	Erasmus+ program participation positively influences international competence.	Supported

4: Discussion of Findings

The findings provide strong empirical support for the positive impact of Erasmus+ mobility programs on all three key educational outcomes examined in this study. The significant positive effect on student satisfaction ($\beta = 0.73$, $R^2 = 0.53$) indicates that Erasmus+ participation strongly influences students' perceptions of their educational experiences and learning environments. This result is consistent with prior research demonstrating that study abroad experiences enhance academic engagement, personal independence, and satisfaction with higher education (Waibel et al., 2017; Wilkins & Balakrishnan, 2013). The comparatively lower mean score for student satisfaction relative to the other constructs may reflect challenges that some participants encounter during mobility, including cultural adjustment difficulties, administrative barriers, and differences in academic systems—findings that align with literature documenting these common challenges among international mobility participants (Netz, 2021).

The significant positive relationship between Erasmus+ participation and academic development ($\beta = 0.71$, $R^2 = 0.50$) corroborates findings from international research highlighting the intellectual benefits of study abroad experiences (Varela, 2017; Potts, 2015). Exposure to diverse educational systems, teaching approaches, and academic cultures through Erasmus+ mobility appears to broaden students' academic perspectives, strengthen critical thinking abilities, and foster independent learning capacities. These outcomes are consistent with the theoretical predictions of Student Development Theory, which posits that challenging educational experiences outside familiar environments promote intellectual and academic growth (Evans et al., 2009; Anderson & Lawton, 2011).

International competence demonstrated a strong positive association with Erasmus+ participation ($\beta = 0.68$, $R^2 = 0.46$), with the highest mean score among all dependent variables ($M = 4.22$). This finding is consistent with the theoretical assumptions of Intercultural Competence Theory, which emphasizes that direct intercultural experience is central to developing intercultural sensitivity, cultural awareness, and global perspectives (Deardorff, 2006; Chen & Starosta, 2000). These outcomes confirm the critical role of experiential international learning in developing the intercultural communication competencies increasingly demanded in global labor markets and academic environments (Jones, 2013; Jackson, 2018). Overall, the results affirm the multidimensional benefits of Erasmus+ mobility programs and support continued investment in international student mobility as a strategic priority for higher education institutions in Türkiye.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the impact of Erasmus+ program participation on student satisfaction, academic development, and international competence among 300 university students in Türkiye. The quantitative analysis, conducted through descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation, and regression procedures, confirmed statistically significant positive relationships between Erasmus+ participation and all three educational outcomes. All three proposed hypotheses were fully supported, providing robust empirical evidence for the educational and intercultural benefits of Erasmus+ mobility programs in the Turkish higher education context.

From a theoretical perspective, the study strengthens and extends the existing literature on higher education internationalization theory, intercultural competence theory, and student development theory by providing empirical

evidence that direct international mobility experiences positively shape students' educational experiences and intercultural competencies. The findings add to the growing body of research on Erasmus+ outcomes, particularly in non-Western European higher education contexts such as Türkiye.

Practically, the results suggest that universities should expand Erasmus+ mobility opportunities, strengthen pre-departure orientation programs, provide intercultural communication training, and improve academic guidance and administrative support for participating students. Policymakers should maintain and increase financial resources dedicated to international mobility programs to enhance the global competitiveness of Turkish higher education institutions and better prepare graduates for globally integrated professional environments.

The study acknowledges several limitations, including the use of convenience sampling and self-reported data, which may affect generalizability, and a cross-sectional design that precludes examination of long-term effects. Future research could employ longitudinal designs, expand samples to include participants from multiple countries, and investigate additional outcomes such as language proficiency, employability, and career development associated with Erasmus+ participation.

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