

The Experiences of The Teachers Who Participated in Erasmus During University Period and Their Opinions on Using These Experiences at School¹

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ABSTRACT : The objective of this research is to determine the experiences of the teachers participated in Erasmus during the university period and their opinions on using these experiences at school. Phenomenology design, one of the qualitative research methods, was used in the research. The participants of the research consisted of 8 teachers participated in Erasmus at university and currently working in different schools. Data were collected via a semi-structured interview form. The data obtained in the study were analyzed by content analysis. As a result of the research, it has been determined that educational and personal development objectives are among the teachers' objectives of participating in Erasmus at university. While language, accommodation, food, credit equivalency, climate and making friends were included in the theme of difficulties, codes for personal and language development, support and teaching methods were found in the theme of satisfaction. It was determined that the teachers applied the knowledge related to the teaching methods they acquired during the program. It was determined that teachers working in private, or project schools did not experience difficulties in applying the knowledge they acquired during the program, but teachers working in public schools had problems in applying the knowledge due to the level of students.

Keywords - Erasmus, Foreign Language, Teacher, Teaching Methods, University

I. INTRODUCTION

The Erasmus program, which has been established and funded by the European Union countries, is a program which tries to support and develop the European youth in activities focused on education, sports, art and culture. The Erasmus program, which includes many disciplines, organizations, private and government institutions, has diversity of activities (Altuntaş, 2021). This study focuses on the Higher Education Mobility dimension of the Erasmus program. This program offers many opportunities to young people while they are attending university. It can have great importance in terms of being an opportunity and even a turning point in the lives of the participants. In other words, it can be said that one of the main trends in current university education is the internationalization process, which includes international student mobility. Although there have been certain obstacles to international student mobility (Bryła & Ciabiada, 2014), Türkiye is one of the most dynamic participants in the Erasmus student mobility program of Europe.

The structure of this research will begin with a review of the current literature on Erasmus program. Firstly, the history, general and specific objectives of the Erasmus program will be explained. The main objective and sub-objectives of the research will be presented next. Subsequently, the methodology section will detail the research design, participants, data collection instruments, data collection and data analysis. The fourth chapter will present the research findings based on the content analysis of the data. Finally, the discussion, conclusion and recommendations chapter will compare the research findings with the existing literature and make suggestions.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 History of the Erasmus Program

European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students was started as a pilot student exchange project between 1981-1986. The program, which was first implemented in 1987 under the name "Erasmus program", included 11 countries (Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, France, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom). In addition, the program, which was started by 11 countries in 1987, had reached the number of 33 countries by the year 2017. Consequently, the program has given 9 million people the chance to study, train, volunteer or gain professional experience abroad in the last 30 years (UA, 2017).

2.2 General Objectives of the Erasmus Program

In the Erasmus program guide, which was published by the European Commission on January 26, 2022, it is declared that the general objective of the program is to support the educational, professional, and personal development of people in education, training, youth, and sport in Europe. It is also announced that the general objective is to support sustainable growth, job quality (Engel, 2010) and social solidarity and to promote innovation and to strengthen European identity and active citizenship. This general objective will be achieved through lifelong learning (Erasmus, 2022).

This higher education mobility action supports the physical and combined mobility of higher education students in any study field or level (short cycle, graduate, postgraduate and PhD levels). Students can do an internship abroad in a business, a research institute, a laboratory, an organization or any related institution or study abroad at a partner higher education institution. Furthermore, students can improve their learning outcomes and development of cross-skills by combining a study abroad semester with an internship (UA,2017). This action accepts the need to offer more flexibility during physical mobility to ensure the program is accessible to students of all backgrounds, circumstances, and study fields while long-term physical mobility is strongly encouraged (Erasmus, 2022).

2.3 Specific Objectives of the Erasmus Program

In the Erasmus program guide (Erasmus,2022), it is stated that the specific purpose of the program is to promote learning mobility of individuals and groups as well as quality, inclusion, equality, excellence, creativity, innovation, and cooperation at the level of institutions and policies in the field of education and training (Erasmus, 2022).

The objective of this program is to contribute to the creation of a European Education Area with global access and to strengthen the link between education and research. This program aims to improve employment opportunities, social solidarity, civic engagement, innovation, and environmental sustainability (UA,2017) in Europe and beyond the border of Europe by ensuring that students from all study fields and all higher education levels have the opportunity to study abroad as part of their education (Erasmus, 2022).

Specific objectives of the action are,

- Exposing students to different knowledge, perspectives, working practices, teaching, and research techniques in European and beyond the borders of Europe.
- Improving cross skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, intercultural, research, communication, and language skills.
- Improving forward-looking skills such as digital and green skills which will enable them to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow.
- Supporting personal improvement such as self-confidence and the ability to adapt to new situations.

The Erasmus program makes contributions to the quality development in higher education at three levels such as system (policy), institutional and individual levels, thus increasing the employment opportunities of university graduates participating in Erasmus mobility (Bryła, 2015). Studies have shown that the Erasmus experience has had an impact on the careers of graduates at an individual level. However, experience abroad is said to be beneficial in employment after graduation. Moreover, employers often state this as an advantage over other candidates. Students with international experience are more likely to pursue higher education, develop stronger personal skills, and demand better jobs. It has been determined that program has an effect on academic improvement. And similarly, it has been noticed by the participants that they have gained some personal development features such as changes in values (Vossensteyn, Lanzendorf & Souto-Otero, 2008).

When the literature is examined, there are many studies on the effect of the Erasmus program on the candidate teachers (Sal-İlhan ve Külekçi, 2022), the problems experienced by the students during the program (Çalışkan, 2017; Çatak,2022; Tetik, 2019), the cultural diplomacy feature of the program (Altuntaş, 2021), the effect of the Erasmus+ exchange program on the self-confidence and individual initiative perceptions of the participants (Gözcü, 2021) and the socio-cultural improvement of the students (Çelik, 2018). However, a study with teachers who participated in the Erasmus program during the university period could not be found. For this reason, the main objective of this research is to examine the contribution of the experiences of the teachers who participated in the Erasmus program during the university period to the schools they work.

Sub-objectives of the research are to determine:

- 1- The objectives of the teachers while participating in the Erasmus program,
- 2- Their opinions on the situations they had difficulties with while evaluating the whole process they spent abroad,
- 3- Their opinions on the situations they are satisfied with while evaluating the whole process they spent abroad,
- 4-how they apply the knowledge they acquired during the program in the school they work,
- 5-the difficulties they experienced in applying the knowledge they acquired during the program to the school they work.

III. METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, information on the research design, participants, data collection instruments, data collection and data analysis process is given.

3.1 Research Design

The phenomenology method, which is one of the qualitative research methods, was used as the method of this research. Qualitative research is a research approach in which data are produced without any statistical processing or other numerical instruments. In qualitative research, situations and events are more realistic and holistic. It was found appropriate to conduct this research in a qualitative research design, since opinions and thoughts are discussed in detail in qualitative studies in which data are analyzed in an objective environment (Creswell, 2013).

The phenomenology method, one of the qualitative research designs, is used to examine how individuals make sense of their experiences and their lives, to discover how they experience a particular phenomenon, and to examine the common points between individuals (Tekindal & Uğuz Arsu, 2020). Phenomenological research accurately describes a phenomenon through experience. Since phenomenology focuses on cases that we are aware of but do not have a detailed and deep understanding (Rose, Beeby & Parker, 1995), the phenomenological method was used in this study. The phenomenon of this research is the effect of Erasmus experience on business life.

3.2 Participants

The participants of this research consist of 8 teachers who participated in the Erasmus program while studying at the university and are currently working as teachers. Purposeful random sampling technique was used while determining the participants. There are no rules for sample size in qualitative research. Sample size depends on what the researcher wants to know, the purpose of the research reliability (Patton, 1990). The validity, relevance and insight gained from qualitative research are more related to the selected participants and the observational/analytical abilities of the researcher rather than the sample size. Random sampling, even from small samples, will significantly increase the reliability of the findings for the audience. This method can be used in many universe representations, but it is more effective with a smaller sample size and a more homogeneous universe (Singh & Jadhav, 2023). The researcher found the purposeful random sampling technique useful and used this sampling technique to examine all the data in detail. In addition, nicknames were given to the teachers participating in the research.

With the answers to the questions in the semi-structured interview form, firstly, Table 1, which conveys the personal information of the participant teachers, was created.

Table 1: The Personal Information of The Participant Teachers

Nickname	Gender	Language	Type of the school	Participation year	Duration of stay	Country
Melek	Female	English	Middle school	2010	6 months	Poland
Kelebek	Female	French	University	2008	4.5 months	Belgium
Serap	Female	German	Anatolian High School	2006	1.5 years	Austria
Güneş	Female	German	Anatolian High School	2010	6 months	Romania
Luna	Female	French	Private High School	2008	4.5 months	Belgium
Akif	Male	English	Anatolian High School	2016	2 months	Ireland
Candy	Female	French	Private Middle School	2010	6 months	Belgium
Traveller	Female	English	Private Middle School	2018	5 months	Bulgaria

As it can be seen from Table 1, eight teachers were interviewed. Seven of the interviewed teachers are female and one is male. All the interviewed teachers are foreign language teachers. The teachers participated in the Erasmus program between 2006-2018 while they were studying at the university and spent at least two months and a maximum of 1.5 years in the hosting country. It is necessary to know a foreign language at a

certain level to apply for the Erasmus program. This could be the reason why all the participating teachers are foreign language teachers.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments

In the semi-structured interview, questions are determined in advance and data are attempted to be collected with these questions (Karasar, 1998). A semi-structured interview form was used to collect the data of this study. During the data collection process, semi-structured interview forms were used as a data collection instrument, as they could enable the interviewed teacher to give detailed answers. In the semi-structured interview, the participants also have control over the research. While writing the questions in this semi-structured interview form, the researcher searched the relevant literature. It was paid particular attention to the open-ended questions to be meaningful (Altunkaya, 2021). Open-ended questions could reveal the subject in detail and depth. For this reason, a semi-structured interview form was chosen as the data collection instrument in accordance with the design of this research.

As a result of the literature research, a semi-structured interview form consisting of four personal information questions and five basic questions was prepared. To ensure the validity of the questions, opinions of four researchers on the form were taken and changes were made parallel to the suggestions. Afterwards, it was seen that the questions were appropriate in the pre-application with one teacher.

3.4 Data Collection

Audio recordings of the interviews were taken with the consent of the participating teachers. The interviews lasted an average of 20 minutes. Additional questions were asked to get detailed answers from the teachers. In addition, at the end of the interview, teachers were asked to give nicknames to themselves.

3.5 Data Analysis

In this study, the data obtained in the semi-structured interview were analyzed by content analysis. Content analysis requires a more detailed investigation of the collected data and reaching the concepts, categories and themes that explain this data. In content analysis, the content of the participants' views is systematically registered (Baltacı, 2019).

Thematic content analysis was carried out in two main stages. First, each transcript was read, and the interview data were attempted to be interpreted. Then, the researcher studied the transcript and had to make sense of what was said by the participants. Thematic analysis involves searching the interview text to find repeated meaning patterns (Liamputtong, 2009). Coding plays a significant role in thematic analysis. To analyze the data, code them and find the connections between them, the researcher had to do vertical coding. Vertical coding is the step that allows the researcher to connect the different codes into categories and subcategories. The researcher reached the themes by determining only the main categories in the analysis of this research.

IV. FINDINGS

As a result of the thematic analysis of the findings obtained through the interviews, five themes related to the experiences of the teachers who participated in the Erasmus program at university and their opinions on the use of these experiences at school were formed. These five themes are shown in Figure 1.

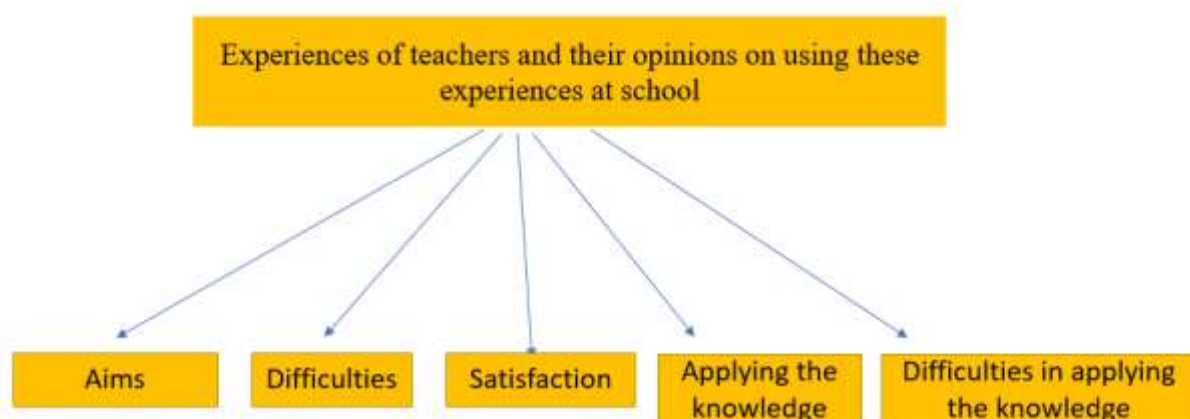


Figure 1. Experiences of teachers participated in Erasmus program and their opinions on use of these experiences at school.

4.1 Objectives of Teachers Participated in Erasmus during the University Period

When the participating teachers were asked about their objectives in participating in the Erasmus program, their answers were grouped under two headings. These headings are educational and personal development objectives.

4.1.1 Educational Objectives

When the objectives of the teachers in participating in the program were examined, five sub-headings emerged under the educational objectives heading: the objectives of developing a foreign language, acquiring academic skills, a good career, learning new approaches in language learning and experiencing different university education.

Table 2: Educational Objectives

Themes	Nicknames of Participants
Objectives of improving a foreign language	Melek, Kelebek, Serap, Luna, Akif, Candy, Traveller
Objectives of acquiring academic skills	Kelebek, Luna
A good career objective	Luna
Objectives of learning new approaches in language learning	Akif, Candy
Objectives of experiencing different university education	Güneş, Traveller

According to Table 2, the objectives of teachers in participating in the Erasmus program are gathered around the objective of improving their foreign language. Only one teacher did not mention objective of improving her foreign language.

While explaining the educational objectives, it has been observed that most of the teachers focus on speaking fluently the foreign language they will teach. Serap said, *“German education in Turkey-at least in the university I was in- was more theoretical. It wasn't spoken much. But I think it wasn't enough, at least we weren't speaking. As a student, I wanted to participate in the Erasmus program and have a better use and understanding of the language in a country where that language is the mother tongue.”* By saying this, Serap, who is currently working as a German teacher, criticized the theoretical foreign language teaching method in her university. Güneş has never mentioned her goal of improving her foreign language. This may be because she is proficient in the foreign language she will teach. In addition, Güneş participated in this program with the main objective of attending a university in the hosting country, and she expressed this with the words *“...I wanted to experience the university education there, frankly...”*. Kelebek *“Since French is one of the official languages in the hosting country, my objective was to be able to speak fluently and improve my foreign language both in terms of academic skills and oral language skills.”* She also emphasized her objective of academic self-development. The reason why Kelebek carried this objective, may be due to the fact that she planned to become an academician during her university years. Luna also informed the researcher that she participated in this program with a good career objective and mentioned this with the words *“...as I will have the opportunity to find a better job for my career...”*. Only Luna said that she participated in the program with a good career objective.

4.1.2 Personal Development Objectives

When the objectives of the teachers in participating in the program were examined, three sub-headings emerged under the heading of personal development objectives: the objectives of traveling, getting to know different cultures, and making international friends.

Table 3: Personal Development Objectives

Themes	Nicknames of Participants
Traveling objectives	Melek, Kelebek, Güneş, Akif
Getting to know different cultures objectives	Kelebek, Güneş, Traveller
Making international friends objectives	Kelebek

According to Table 3, it was seen that the teachers mentioned traveling the most among the personal development objectives while participating in the Erasmus program. Only one teacher expressed her objective of making international friends.

As teachers' personal development objectives, travelling is the most common response. By saying, *“...I wanted to travel...after that, I wanted to see a different country”* Melek emphasized that one of the objectives of participating in the Erasmus program was to travel. Traveller said, *“...in fact, one of the most important things I wanted to see was culture, that is, to experience and live more...”* She clearly expressed that she especially

aimed to receive education from different cultures. Kelebek, on the other hand, said, "...I wanted to make different friendships and international friends, this was my goal." She admitted that she participated in this program because she wanted to make international friends. The remarkable point here is that Kelebek participates in the program with all three objectives, and this may be due to the desire to benefit from the program as much as possible.

4.2 Difficulties Experienced by Teachers in the Erasmus Process

Teachers were asked about the difficulties they experienced during the Erasmus program. The answers given by the teachers to this question are grouped under six headings. These headings were identified as difficulties arising from language, accommodation, food, credit balance, climate and making friends.

Table 4: Difficulties Experienced by Teachers in the Erasmus Process

Themes	Nicknames of Participants
Difficulties arising from accommodation	Melek, Kelebek, Güneş, Luna, Candy, Traveller
Difficulties arising from language	Melek, Serap, Güneş, Candy, Traveller
Difficulties arising from food	Melek
Difficulties arising from credit equivalency	Kelebek
Difficulties arising from climate	Akif
Difficulties arising from making friends	Candy

According to Table 4, the participating teachers had the most difficulty in accommodation during the Erasmus program. Secondly, they had difficulties arising from language. Only one teacher experienced the difficulty of food, credit balance, climate, and making friends.

4.2.1 Difficulties arising from accommodation

The biggest difficulty experienced by the teachers participating in the Erasmus program was the problem of accommodation. Since some universities were insufficient in arranging accommodation, teachers had to arrange their accommodation themselves. Luna, who found a place to stay with a Turkish family with her own efforts, said that she had a lot of trouble in this regard. "It was very negative for me." she said. When we asked her why it was negative, she replied, "...because they were trying to speak Turkish, we (Turkish people) are nationalists, I mean they were trying to speak Turkish to us, we were trying to speak French.", emphasizing the objective of making maximum use of the program.

Candy thought of returning to Türkiye in the first month, as she was having trouble finding a place to stay. When we asked about the points she was satisfied with during the process, Candy especially returned to the answer to the previous question and explained the accommodation problem of the Erasmus program, "... Let me add that about the accommodation of the Erasmus program, those who sent to this program did not find a place of accommodation. I found it with my own efforts. For example, I can say that it was its negative side. Because at that age, how was I going to manage to find accommodation? I had never been to a country like Belgium on my own. It was very difficult for me to find a place to stay. The first time I wasn't used to it. For the first month, I wanted to go back so much." she said. Even though it has been 13 years since she participated in the program, it was seen that Candy still carries the anger of being left alone in accommodation problem.

4.2.2 Difficulties arising from language

The teachers who commented that they had difficulties especially arising from language were Traveller and Melek. Traveller went to Bulgaria and because of not knowing the Cyrillic alphabet during the program, she expressed the difficulties arising from the alphabet by saying, "I had to adapt to that language when I was trying to decipher the Cyrillic alphabet, even when I was reading the signs there or when I had to go from one place to another by bus." Melek, on the other hand, went to Poland, and Melek, who was studying in the English language teaching department, said that she had difficulty because the people in Poland spoke Polish. By saying "...then the language there is not English, not Turkish, so it's a different language.", she recalled that she was deeply saddened by this process. Melek and Traveller added that they started to understand both languages during the program and continued their daily lives. The other teacher who has difficulties with language was Candy. When asked about the difficulties she experienced during the process, she said, "... the situations I had difficulty with were the language when I first went because we weren't that fluent yet." Candy said that she had a language problem without thinking.

4.2.3 Difficulties arising from food

Only Melek stated that she had difficulty arising from food. Melek said, *"For example, we couldn't eat everything. Then, we couldn't eat everything in such a comfortable way, like in Turkey, there weren't too many options, or I don't know... because we couldn't eat everything comfortably because of the other things they consumed, there were difficulties."* She informed the researcher that she was sensitive about food. None of the other teachers mentioned difficulties arising from food.

4.2.4 Difficulties arising from credit equivalency

Only Kelebek expressed that she had difficulties arising from the credit equivalency. *"...the courses were, of course, a little different from the education system in Turkey in terms of academics, so we took extra courses to ensure credit equivalency. I took 10 courses there. It created a little bit difficulty for me because the number of courses was high and their content was so intense, I would say a bit of an academic difficulty, but I can say that the main problem was accommodation."* said Kelebek, placing the difficulty arising from the credit equivalency in the second place after the difficulty arising from the accommodation. Having to take ten courses to ensure credit equivalency, Kelebek stated that she had a very difficult time academically and could not participate in social life much because she had to study.

4.2.5 Difficulties arising from climate

Akif, who went to Ireland for the Erasmus program, expressed that he had difficulty only arising from climate in this process. He said, *"...the weather was very different, I had trouble with it, I went in the cold, very rainy season."* He especially emphasized that he was in Ireland during a period of very cold and rainy weather conditions. The only problem Akif experienced during the program was the climate problem.

4.2.6 Difficulties arising from making friends

Only Candy has expressed that she has difficulties in making friends. By saying *"Then, it was a little difficult to make friends. I was in a classroom that was formed before because it was a bit of a problem to integrate there."*, she also stated the reasons why she had difficulty in making friends. Afterwards, Candy started to make friends and added that the program process became more enjoyable.

4.3 Situations When Teachers Were Satisfied During the Erasmus Process

During the Erasmus program, teachers were asked about the situations they were satisfied with. The answers given by the teachers to this question are grouped under four headings. These headings are personal improvement, language improvement, support, and satisfaction with teaching methods (academic improvement).

Table 5: Situations When Teachers Were Satisfied During the Erasmus Process

Themes	Nicknames of Participants
Satisfaction with personal improvement	Melek, Kelebek, Serap, Güneş, Akif, Traveller
Satisfaction with language improvement	Melek, Kelebek, Serap, Güneş, Luna, Akif, Traveller, Candy
Satisfaction with teaching methods (Academic improvement)	Kelebek, Serap, Güneş, Luna, Akif, Candy, Traveller
Satisfaction with support	Serap, Güneş, Luna, Candy, Traveller

According to Table 5, most of the teachers stated that they experienced satisfaction with language improvement. Looking at this table, it was seen that the majority of the teachers finished this program with satisfaction from different aspects.

4.3.1 Satisfaction with personal improvement

Kelebek, Güneş and Akif said that they started to feel confident after participating in this program. Güneş expressed this confidence, *"When I first went on my own, I liked being able to stand on my own feet, to cook and to be able to sustain myself. It gave me that confidence and feeling that I could live on my own."* In fact, Güneş had to learn German as the first foreign language during her middle school years. Seeing that German is spoken in daily life and taking German lessons at universities made her forget her middle school years, when she had to learn German in a disadvantageous way. And the program became a source of happiness for her. By saying *"...it increased my motivation ...my self-confidence increased even more."*, Akif, on the other hand, expressed that he has gained self-confidence. By saying *"...we went abroad for the first time, then we had good experiences about what they did abroad, how to get there, ... after that, we had the opportunity to get to know a different culture, we visited different places when we went there, we went to different countries, for example, we went to Germany, Poland We visited other cities of Poland."*, Melek informed the researcher that she was pleased to travel.

Kelebek said, *"I can say that cultural diversity has helped a lot, too"*, Serap said, *"...it was very open to human diversity and the place I was in was already a university where a lot of Erasmus students were accepted, so I got to know people from so many countries."*, and Traveller, on the other hand, said, *"We visited cities at that hour in order to get to know the culture as much as possible... it was very important, and at the same time, the rules were being complied with in a very serious way."*. Consequently, they stated that they were pleased because they travelled and got to know different cultures. Melek said, *"Because I met different people, we made different friendships"*, Kelebek said, *"...there were other foreign and international students besides ourselves, we were communicating with them."* They specifically informed the researcher that they were pleased with the fact that they had international friendships.

4.3.2 Satisfaction with language improvement

Serap and Güneş stated that they were pleased that they started to speak German more fluently during this program. Serap said, *"...we were better in about a week, actually we are able to speak (German), so you have difficulties, the teacher forces you, you speak."*. Serap stated that she started speaking German a week later with the coordinator to whom she could not speak German when she got off the plane. By saying *"... it was a big university, in fact, we attended an intensive language course for a month when we went."*, Güneş stated that language training was given by the university for a month. Melek, on the other hand, emphasized that she learned Polish in Poland and started to live her daily life. As Candy started using the language, she made friends and had the opportunity to benefit more from the Erasmus program.

4.3.3 Satisfaction with teaching methods (Academic improvement)

By saying *"...what I was satisfied with was the school's system, because it worked systematically, it was an environment just like I wanted, the teachers were very active, but it was not just a school, it was a very educational place. There were no such classic clichés, rules. They were creative, everything was beautiful, everyone was very active, so it was a very good experience for me."*, Luna expressed that she liked the school system in Belgium during the Erasmus program she attended. She also added that she was pleased that the teachers were active and creative. By saying *"...it was very disciplined. People were respected anyway. If he discovers a feature of you, the teacher does not let you go"*, she added that university professors, when they see a feature of the student, do not stop following him to improve it further. Kelebek commented that she learned new teaching methods and that she was pleased with it. She concluded her words by saying that she received information about differentiated education at the university she attended for the Erasmus program. She said *"...we encountered such a methodology under the name of differentiated education or training, for example, it was different."*

Traveller felt the need to emphasize that the courses she attended were not as intense as in Türkiye. In addition, it was different for the teacher to create the curriculum because teachers in Türkiye do not have autonomy to create the curriculum, the curriculum is sent to them by the Ministry of National Education. She added that importance is given to communicative teaching and that individual communication is more important than a book or notebook. She stated that she was pleased to have the opportunity to go to schools such as internships and make observations during the lesson, but that she was a little upset that the lesson she observed was not a foreign language lesson. She also added that during this observation process, the teacher took care of the students individually and that the students were mostly active.

4.3.4 Satisfaction with support

Serap admitted that she was satisfied with the support given by the coordinator who came to meet her at the airport. By saying *"My classmate and I both travelled on the same plane and then landed there, and when we landed there... an exchange student working at the Erasmus office welcomed us. In a couple of days, he took care of us in the same way, helped us, introduced the city, introduced the school, we spoke in English."*, she expressed this support. Güneş stayed in Romania for six months during her university period. After graduation, she went to Germany as an intern and stayed for a year. She enthusiastically described both experiences. By saying *"...one mentor named Ineke was so supportive of me during the search for a house and a bike ...there, I wasn't driving a car."*, she expressed her gratitude for the teacher who mentored her and helped her buy a bike and find a house.

By saying *"...the apartment was used as a dormitory, of course, there were Bulgarian immigrants and they helped us as much as possible."*, Traveller stated that the other Bulgarian students who stayed in the same dormitory supported her. By saying *"I was very satisfied with the family I stayed with."*, Candy expressed that she was very satisfied with the family she stayed with and their support. However, while emphasizing this support of the family, she criticized for the second time that the university did not find a place to stay and did not provide this support.

4.4 Applying Knowledge Obtained During the Program to Schools

It was asked whether the teachers applied the knowledge they acquired during the Erasmus program. The answers given by the teachers to this question were gathered under a single heading. This heading is the application of knowledge about teaching methods.

Table 6: Applying Knowledge Obtained During the Program to Schools

Themes	Nicknames of Participants
Foreign language teaching methods	Kelebek, Serap, Luna, Candy
Organizing activities	Güneş, Traveller
Playing games	Melek
Teaching vocabulary	Akif
Using materials	Serap

According to Table 6, the majority of teachers apply knowledge about foreign language teaching methods. In addition, looking at this table, it was seen that all the teachers applied the different knowledge they learned during this program in their schools.

4.4.1 The Application of Knowledge About Teaching Methods.

Traveller has been appointed by the school administration as a consultant teacher for MUN (Model United Nation) because of her Erasmus experience. She proudly said that her students won prizes at MUN. She has also been appointed as one of the teachers on the Europe school trip. By saying *“Because I have Erasmus experience and I was in an international program, I was able to participate in an event like MUN this year, more precisely, I became a consultant...because they knew my Erasmus background... the head of the Department had me in this position, frankly, more I was chosen as one of the teachers for the next Europe school trip. In this sense, I had such feedback due to Erasmus...”*, she expressed the effect of participating in Erasmus program on her career. She also added that she is an innovative teacher, teaches student-centered lessons, and transfers the cultural knowledge she gained in the Erasmus program to her students.

Güneş tried to apply the activities she learned during the Erasmus program in the schools where she worked. For example, she borrowed materials for the suitcase activity and jigsaw activity from the Goethe Institute and applied them 3-4 times in her school with the students. She also held the rally event with her students in the region where the Turkish-German bookstore is located. By saying *“...but when it was interactive, children liked it more and I was taking it across... I was handing out a group of students in Beyoğlu, giving questions...instructions...for example, he was going, he was finding the answer in the book of the Turkish-German Bookstore, he was writing the answer, who was going to come first, he was writing 5 or 6 There are two questions, after that, he goes to the institute, he is trying to find the answer, he is trying to fit the puzzle.”*, she explained her attempts. In addition, Güneş did an Erasmus project and went abroad with students. The student she prepared for the international German Olympics last year came third in Türkiye.

Akif makes attempts to teach Irish English to his students. By saying *“I tried to apply Web 2 tools, words, information, structures that I learned in my professional life or in English. Irish English is a different English, I had the opportunity to compare it and explain it to my students.”*, he expressed that he gave the differences between British English and Irish English to his students.

Melek only speaks English and plays English games during the lesson in the project class. By saying *“Sometimes I can apply it. I'm trying to apply the methods I learned there in the classroom. I try to speak English in class, though not always. While lecturing... The subject related to that unit is mentioned. They ask me if I went there. It feels very different to them because I lived there...”*, Melek confirmed that she tried to implement some methods but had difficulties in doing so.

Kelebek learned the differentiated teaching technique during the Erasmus program. By saying *“...the autonomy of each student is important here and everyone is autonomous. Everyone is on the move at the lesson... I had done 5 workshops simultaneously. It's like a listening and reading workshop. Everyone must stop by every workshop within a class hour. There is a certain time given to each workshop and there are objectives there. For those purposes, for example, there is a text to read and discuss. There are instructions like he will do something and have a dialogue with his friend. They were sticking a post-it on the board for the workshop where he completed the instructions...”*, she expressed how she applied the differentiated teaching method during the lesson. In addition, her professor at the university wrote an article on differentiated teaching and encouraged Kelebek to organize differentiated education workshops. By saying *“, Actually I can't say that I am using what I learned there, because they were in the past. I have added a lot of information on it, seminars, courses, trainings and so on. Everything is changing and in motion, but of course I use what I learned there by blending it.”*, she also emphasized that she did not finish her professional development with the Erasmus

program, and that she continued her professional development by participating in many seminars, courses, and trainings.

Serap applies the warm-up activities she learned in the intensive German course at her current school. She even said that she was very surprised when she saw that her teacher was using a ball during the warm-up activities. By saying "...we were forming a circle in the classrooms. With a ball in their hands, they were throwing the ball in turn. For example, it was the first time I had seen someone pick up a ball and use it effectively in a language lesson," she expressed her surprise. Serap admitted that she felt the lack of speaking German when she went to Austria and attributed this to grammar education in Türkiye. By saying "I got used to using materials in general, and my teachers were using a lot of materials there. I also received various trainings on the use of materials. I even participated in 1 or 2 competitions. My biggest problem was anyway, not being able to speak.", she added that she gives importance to the use of materials so that her students will not have the same problem as her. She also added that she prefers using natively like listening texts.

After graduating from university, Luna worked at a bilingual school, where teachers are given the opportunity to create their own curriculum. By saying "Student must be active, we were learning this at the university as well. We have seen this in practice abroad. I am the passive side. At the end of the lesson, I make corrections if necessary.", she expressed that the students actively participate in the lessons at the school where he works now. She stated that the school gave her support. Luna added that she does not give homework and encourages students to learn the subject in class.

Candy informed the researcher that she used the cognitive method, by speaking French with the students during the lesson and having the students find the grammar rules, and that she learned this during the Erasmus program. By saying "At the school where I work now, we teach French by speaking French. Most of the teachers were teaching French in Turkish at the university. But when I went there, because the teachers used to explain by speaking French, I try to make the students find it in the way they show.", she explained how she applied the cognitive method in her classes.

4.5 Difficulties in Applying the Knowledge Teachers Acquired During the Erasmus Program in Schools

Teachers were asked about the difficulties they experienced in applying the knowledge they learned during the Erasmus program to the schools where they work. The answers given by the teachers to this question were gathered under a single heading. This heading is the difficulties experienced in applying the knowledge related to teaching methods.

Table 7: Difficulties in Applying the Knowledge Teachers Acquired During the Erasmus Program in Schools

Themes	Nicknames of Participants
Difficulty of foreign language	Candy, Luna
Student level	Melek
School administration	Serap
Difficulty with Erasmus and e-twinning platform	Güneş
Activities canceled due to the pandemic	Güneş
Students' prejudice	Serap
Distance learning	Kelebek
Foreign language class (exam centered teaching)	Akif

According to Table 7, most of the teachers have problems, albeit minor, in applying the knowledge they have acquired during the program at the school where they work. Only Traveller is not included in this table because she stated that she had no problems. The difficulty of the foreign language is the most frequently mentioned theme and was expressed by two French teachers.

4.5.1 The Difficulties Experienced in Applying the Knowledge Related to Teaching Methods

By saying "I teach the 5th and 6th grades this year and their levels are quite low, they cannot understand or apply many things. That's why I'm having difficulties.", Melek informed the researcher that she had difficulty in applying English teaching methods in classes because the level of the students was low. And by saying "...first of all, they have prejudices. They say it's very difficult, I can't do it.", she emphasized how prejudiced the students are. She said that she teaches in only one project class, and she does not have any difficulties in this project class. By saying "...I teach in a project class this year. We study there more comfortably. The lesson time is too much. We bought different books. We are doing listening and speaking. We are playing games. If they were prejudiced against English, they wouldn't have come to the project class. Their families are also more supportive...", she added that it is easy to teach in this class. She stated that their

awareness of learning English is high because students voluntarily enroll in this foreign language class. For these reasons, Melek emphasized that she only spoke English and played English games during the lesson in this class, and that such a learning environment did not exist in other classes.

Kelebek stated that she could not apply the differentiated teaching method to her students because the level of her students was at A1 level. She also added that they started to have distance education due to the earthquake that took place on February 6 and that it is difficult to implement foreign language teaching methods and activities in distance education. She also explained that it was not possible for students to stand up and throw something at each other for warm-up activities during their distance education process due to the pandemic. By saying “...the students are very important here, are we teaching children or are we teaching adolescents? And what are their language levels?”, she also added that there may be difficulties in applying the teaching methods due to the age of the target group, but she added that differentiated teaching can be applied to students by preparing in advance.

Serap stated that she had a problem with the school administration about getting parents to buy books because the German textbooks did not come from the ministry before. She was instructed by the principal to teach the lesson by distributing photocopies. By saying “I stood against the administration plus I got the support of the parents, the problem was solved because the parents supported me and they wanted real books instead of photocopies.”, she expressed that she had solved the problem. Serap added that the other negative factor was the students' point of view that underestimated German in the past years. However, she added that this point of view has changed recently, and students give more importance to German because they want to continue their education in Germany.

By saying “...but since it is difficult to go to Erasmus right now, they blocked the way.”, Güneş explained that it was difficult to do an Erasmus project after stating that she did not have any difficulties arising from school. By saying “There is e-twinning. It is also important to be able to set the calendar. Because the e-twinning page has changed this year. It keeps giving an error. We can't upload... Everything fell into Belgium's e-twinning pool, and they failed to do so.”, she complained that she is currently trying to apply for an e-twinning project, but she could not apply because the e-twinning portal has changed, and she is talking to the central agency. She also added that the Goethe-Institute had stopped suitcase activity due to the pandemic.

Luna stated that she had no difficulties at the bilingual school she started working at after graduating from university. However, she added that she had difficulties at the school she currently works at. She pays attention not to teach grammar rules during the lesson, gives importance to speaking-oriented lessons. However, by saying “Since French is very difficult, we often repeat the same subject to students for 2-3 weeks. I focus on pronunciation, especially speaking lessons. I give patterns in speaking class. First of all, I try to deal with motivational deficiencies.”, she expressed that she had difficulty during the classes because French is a difficult language and students are prejudiced.

Candy said that she taught subjects in French, but the students had difficulties. By saying “Because we speak French in classes, maybe they have difficulties in understanding French because Turkish is their mother tongue. We need to use different materials and visual materials so that they can understand...”, she added that she should use different materials and visuals to attract the attention of the students.

Akif and Traveller said that the schools they work support them. In addition, Traveller confirmed that as an innovative school that follows new techniques, her school encourages the teachers. By saying “...unfortunately, we do not have the opportunity to practice everything, because we teach English for the exam.”, Akif expressed that he had difficulty in applying English teaching methods in his classroom as he teaches in a language class, and he only teaches grammar, vocabulary and reading.

V. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Eight teachers who participated in the Erasmus program at the university period and are currently working in different schools were interviewed and their experiences and their opinions on using these experiences were investigated. At the end of the study, the objectives of the teachers in participating in Erasmus program during the university period, the difficulties they experienced during the Erasmus process, the situations they were satisfied with, the application of the knowledge they obtained during Erasmus to the schools, and the difficulties they experienced in applying the knowledge to the schools they work were determined.

The sample of the study consisted of foreign language teachers. This may be because it is necessary to know a certain level of foreign language to participate in the Erasmus Program. Similarly, Aydın (2012) declared in his study that the participants of the Erasmus program from Türkiye mainly consist of students from language teaching departments, language-related departments such as tourism, or departments where intensive preparatory language courses are offered. He mentioned as an example that 12 of the 15 people who participated in the Erasmus program from Balıkesir University in the 2009-2010 academic year were educated in the English Language Department.

Two sub-headings were determined under the heading of teachers' objectives in participating in Erasmus during the university period, namely educational objectives, and personal development objectives. Objectives of teachers in participating in the program coincide with the objective of developing participants' cross-cultural skills such as communication skills, language skills, critical thinking, problem solving, intercultural skills and research skills, which are among the specific objectives of the Erasmus program. In addition, in the literature research, no study was found with the teachers who participated in Erasmus during the university period. For this reason, the results of the research were compared with the results of the studies conducted with pre-service teachers. The educational objectives and personal development objectives of this research are consistent with the conclusion of the research conducted by Aslan Bağcı, Erdem and Erişen (2018) and Demir and Demir (2009) that Erasmus students generally attend the program with the objectives of improving their foreign language skills, getting to know different cultures and improving themselves. In addition, the expression of educational and personal objectives of the teachers participating in this study coincides with general objectives of the Erasmus program which aim supporting the educational, professional, and personal development of people in education, training, youth, and sports in Europe and beyond.

Under the heading of difficulties experienced by teachers during the Erasmus process, six sub-headings were determined: difficulties arising from language, accommodation, food, credit equivalency, climate and making friends. The skills that teachers develop in coping with these challenges conformed to one of the specific objectives of the Erasmus program which aimed developing forward-looking skills such as digital and green skills that will enable young people to overcome the challenges of today and tomorrow. In addition, in the studies of Aydın (2012), Duman (2020), Çatak (2022), and Demir and Demir (2009), the first of the difficulties faced by novice teachers is the difficulties arising from the language and they coincide with the result of this study. Particularly, Duman (2020), mentioned that it is difficult for students to study in a different language instead of the language they know at hosting university. A similar situation was expressed by two participants of this study because the mother tongue of the hosting country is not the same as the language in which they were educated. Another result in Aydın's (2012) study is the difficulties arising from being homesick. None of the teachers participating in this study mentioned the difficulty arising from being homesick. In addition, the difficulties arising from credit equivalency and the difficulties arising from making friends in the studies of Çatak (2022), Aydın (2012) and Sal-İlhan and Külekçi (2022) coincide with the results of this study. In addition, some of the difficulties experienced in Aydın's study originate from climate and food. As a result of this study, only one teacher stated that they had difficulties arising from food and climate. On the other hand, in Aydın's study, the participants did not mention the difficulties arising from accommodation. However, the participants of this study especially emphasized the difficulties arising from accommodation. In the studies of Çatak (2022) and Çepni, Aydın, and Kılınç (2018), it was stated that the participating students generally experienced difficulties arising from accommodation. In the study of Sal-İlhan and Külekçi (2022), the participants mentioned the financial difficulties they experienced. However, the teachers participating in this study did not mention financial difficulties. In short, it was determined that the most important difficulty faced by the students was the difficulty arising from the language. For this reason, it can be ensured that the students participating in the program should attend a one-month intensive speaking course in hosting country. In addition, universities in Türkiye can change their foreign language teaching methods and apply new methods focusing on speaking. In addition, it was determined that the other difficulty faced by the students was the difficulty of accommodation. The university that will host the students should solve the accommodation problem before the students come to their countries. The Erasmus office of the university should request this from the hosting university.

Under the title of situations that teachers are satisfied with during the Erasmus process, four sub-headings have been determined: satisfaction with personal development, language improvement, support, and teaching methods (academic development). This result shows that the Erasmus program achieves the specific objectives of exposing students to different views, knowledge, teaching, and research methods and working practices in European and international contexts and supporting personal development such as the ability to adapt to new situations and self-confidence. In addition, in the study conducted by Aydın (2012) in the literature review, pre-service teachers stated that their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills improved in relation to language development. In parallel, the participants in Sal-İlhan and Külekçi's (2022) study informed them that they improved in terms of language development. The language improvement result in the studies of Aydın (2012), Önen (2017), Aslan Bağcı, Erdem and Erişen (2018) and Sal-İlhan and Külekçi (2022) coincides with the language improvement result of this study. Again, according to the results of the studies of Aydın (2012), Ersoy and Günel (2011), Aslan and Jacobs (2014), Demir and Demir (2009) and Önen (2017), pre-service teachers have benefited in professional development. The participants, who learned about different education systems, had the opportunity to compare the Turkish education system with the education systems of the hosting country, and learned different foreign language teaching methods and techniques that they could apply in their future professional life. This result of Aydın's study coincides with the teaching methods (academic development) result of this study. In addition, in Aydın's (2012) study, participants believe that their

professional development makes it easier to find a job in Türkiye and abroad. Gonzalez, Mesanza, and Mariel (2011) also underlined the positive impact of the Erasmus experience on employment opportunities. Among the participants of this study, teachers working in private schools expressed that participating in the Erasmus program contributed to their professional development. Teachers working in project schools informed the researcher that they provided information on their participation in the Erasmus program in the application form when applying to the school, but they do not know whether it had an impact during recruitment. Since teachers working in regular public schools are assigned to schools according to the results of Civil Service Entrance Examination (KPSS), participation in the Erasmus program has no contribution. No research on the effect of the program on employment of Turkish students could be found. In the study of Sal-İlhan and Külekçi (2022), professional development was not reported by the majority of the participants. Because, according to the results of their study, only 8 out of 37 participants stated that they believed that Erasmus had an impact on their career development. According to the studies of Aslan and Jacobs (2014), Aydın (2012), Demir and Demir (2009), Önen (2017), Aslan Bağcı, Erdem and Erişen (2018) and Sal-İlhan and Külekçi (2022), one of the important contributions of the program is also about the personal development of the participants. This result in the studies of Aydın (2012), Önen (2017) and Sal-İlhan and Külekçi (2022) also coincides with the personal development result of this study. According to the result of Ünlü's (2015) study, the participants obtained more professional development than personal development. In addition, Ersoy and Günel (2011) expressed that the professional and personal development of the participants were affected in the study they conducted with pre-service teachers who came to a university in Turkey within the framework of the Erasmus program. Related to the satisfaction with the support from the results of this study, two teachers mentioned that the university they went to provided them with support under the name of coordinator or mentor. Some of the other teachers mentioned the support of other students or local people in their dormitory. The finding of Çepni, Aydın, and Kılınç's (2018) study also showed that the students participating in the program mostly resorted to the support of friends and individual efforts to solve the problems they experienced. Only one participant stated that she received support from the Erasmus coordinator in solving the problem she experienced. As a result, a mentor or coordinator can be appointed by the hosting universities for each student participating in the Erasmus program. It can be ensured that students receive support from these people in the process of solving problems.

The sub-heading of applying the knowledge related to teaching methods has been determined under the heading of applying the knowledge gained by the teachers during the Erasmus process to the schools. No study was found with teachers who participated in the Erasmus program during the university period. However, in the study of Ünlü (2015) with pre-service teachers, the participants admitted that they were ready to work in jobs other than their study field, and some participants even added that they changed their plans and worldviews. Career plans may change after participating in the Erasmus program. All the teachers interviewed in this study work as teachers because they are graduates of the faculty of education.

Under the heading of difficulties experienced by teachers in applying the knowledge they obtained during the Erasmus process to the schools, the sub-heading of difficulties experienced in applying the knowledge related to teaching methods has been determined. It has been observed that teachers working in private schools and project schools have no difficulty in applying the knowledge they have acquired, but teachers working in public schools have problems in applying the knowledge they obtained due to the level of students. In addition, this finding of this study could not be compared with any other study, since no study was found with teachers who participated in the Erasmus program during the university period. As a result, it was determined that all the studies were carried out immediately after the students who participated in the Erasmus program during the university period returned from the program. However, no research could be found on the effect of the program on the employment opportunities of Turkish students. For this reason, a study examining the possibilities of applying the knowledge gained during the program process can be carried out by universities after students are employed.

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