Erasmus Students' Mobility Priorities: A Rank-Order Scaling Study

Erasmus Öğrencilerinin Hareketlilik Öncelikleri: Bir Sıralama Ölçeği Çalışması

Eren Halil ÖZBERK

Trakya Üniversitesi, Eğitim Fakültesi, Eğitim Bilimleri Bölümü, Edirne, Türkiye.

Nagihan BOZTUNÇ ÖZTÜRK, Leyla YILMAZ FINDIK

Hacettepe Üniversitesi, Ankara, Türkiye.

Suzan Beyza KAPTI

Ankara Üniversitesi, Eğitim Bilimleri Fakültesi, Eğitim Bilimleri Bölümü, Ankara, Türkiye.

Abstract

Promoting mobility among students and staff was among the earliest European initiatives in higher education and is still among the most visible. Bologna process has played a prominent role in promoting mobility by establishing more compatible course patterns and encouraging greater transparency. Student mobility involved 213,266 people distributed among the twenty-seven states of the European Union, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, Croatia, and Turkey. The purpose of this study is to identify the preferences studying abroad and present the priorities of incoming and outgoing Erasmus students' university preference among the ranked items. According to the rank ordering scaling findings; incoming students prioritized the university related factors while outgoing students prioritized the factors related social environment.

Keywords: Erasmus students, Bologna process, mobility, rank-order scaling

Özet

Öğrenci ve personel değişim programları yükseköğretimde ilk başlarda olduğu gibi günümüzde de önemini korumaktadır. Bologna süreci, derslerin karşılaştırılabilirliğinin artırılması ve uluslararası geçişleri sağlaması bakımından değişim süreçlerini desteklemek adına önemli rol oynamıştır. Bu zamana kadar 27 Avrupa Birliği devleti, İzlanda, Lihtenştayn, Norveç, İsviçre, Hırvatistan ve Türkiye de dâhil olmak üzere toplamda 213,266 kişi öğrenci değişim programlarına katılmıştır. Bu araştırma ile değişim programlarındaki Erasmus öğrencilerinin üniversite seçmedeki önceliklerinin gelen ve giden öğrencilere göre ortaya çıkarılması amaçlanmaktadır. Araştırmada elde edilen sıralam ölçeği bulgularına göre gelen öğrencilerin üniversiteye ait özellikleri dikkate aldığı; giden öğrencilerin ise sosyal çevreyi etkileyen durumları öncelik olarak ele aldıkları belirlemiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Erasmus öğrecileri, Bologna süreci, değişim programları, sıralama ölçeği

1. Introduction

Bologna Process was first launched in 1999, with the aim of establishing the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010. The EHEA established in 2010 and now has 47 member states. The signatory countries play a full role in the consolidation and development of the EHEA. The Bologna Declaration adopted six Action Lines, two of which were to enhance student mobility and to extend the European dimension in undergraduate studies (Bologna Declaration, 1999). Mobility can be defined with various terms, but the most visible one is the movement of degree-seeking students and short-term mobility, or study abroad (Colucci et al, 2012). Promoting mobility among students and staff was among the earliest European initiatives in higher education and is still among the most visible. Bologna process has played a prominent role in promoting mobility by establishing more compatible course patterns and encouraging greater transparency (Scott, 2012). Bologna Process adopted the "European Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students' (ERASMUS) as a key instrument in fulfilling these aims (Sweeney, 2012). Erasmus program, the largest exchange program in Europe, was launched 25 years ago, since then it has become an increasingly prominent feature of universities in Europe and a pivotal catalyst for European integration (Colucci et al, 2012). Erasmus can also named as the subprogram of Higher Teaching and Higher Professional Training. Its international cooperativeness purpose has made it the most important program in the higher education. Student mobility involved 213,266 people distributed among the twenty-seven states of the European Union, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, Croatia, and Turkey.

The specific Erasmus goals (European Union, 2014) promote the attainment of a European Space for Higher Education by reinforcement of training and innovation. The operational goals are as follows: a) To improve students' and teachers' mobility in Europe qualitatively and quantitatively, achieving stays for three million people; b) To improve the quality and volume of multilateral cooperation among European institutions of higher education; c) To increase the transparency and compatibility of qualifications of higher education and higher professional training; d) To improve cooperation among educational institutions and businesses; e) To facilitate the development of tertiary level innovative educational practices, as well as their transfer, even between countries; f) To support the development of contents, services, pedagogies, and innovative lifelong learning practices based on Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) (Fombona et al, 2013).

Erasmus is expressed as one of the most popular educational program and indeed it has developed beyond just being an educational program because it has gained the status of a social and cultural phenomenon. Other contributions of the Erasmus program is stated that it ensures (i) to increase the number of students spending a period of study in an European country, (ii) to strengthen the interaction between citizens in Europe, (iii) enhance the international dimension of youth activities, (iv) to improve the level of key competences and skills of young, (v) to foster quality improvements

in youth work, (vi) to complement policy reforms at local, regional and national level. Moreover, one of the most value of the mobility program is that it gives university students a chance for living for the first time in a foreign country and learn firsthand in another country (Sigalas, 2009). Beyond these contributions researches from prior studies show that Erasmus is considered as a valuable program since it enhances students' employability abroad and increases internationalization of universities (European Union, 2014; Bracth et al, 2006).

European Union has been promoting student mobility for decades within Europe. Nearly two million students in total have studied abroad and had the opportunity to learn other cultures and societies (Sigalas, 2009). Spain, France, Germany, the UK and Italy are the most common Erasmus destinations which cover the %63 of the total Erasmus population. The least preferred countries are listed as Latvia, Cyprus, Iceland, Malta and Croatia. It has concluded from the research that the largest group of Erasmus students, higher than %20, was Business Studies and Management and this is followed by Engineering and Technology, Languages and Philosophical Sciences as well as Social Sciences and Law (European Union, 2014).

Beyond all the objectives and contributions of the Erasmus program mentioned above, in reality, reasons remaining the preference of student mobility programs abroad might not expect the theorical reasons. Most popular reasons for participating in mobility programs abroad are living abroad, improving language skills, making new relations and developing personal skills (European Union, 2014). Researches show that Erasmus students initial motivation to chose mobility program is to discover a country and learn its culture (Mitchell, 2012). Kasvari (2009) conducted a research to examine the factors affecting students' decision on studying abroad. It was found that personal and social factors were the main factors affecting the students' decision of studying abroad. Also, financial situation and academic environment were expressed as the main barriers for students while making decision. According to the findings it is concluded that students overcome the obstacles related to family, cultural resistance and barriers and preferred studying abroad.

European Student Network concluded a survey to visualize the experiences of studying abroad for exchange students in Europe (Krzaklewska and Krupnik, 2006). According to the report, students' satisfaction with their stay was measured by a questionnaire in four domains: a) *satisfaction with stay*; b) *satisfaction with studies* (concerning the academic dimension of stay); c) *recommendation to a friend to spend a period abroad* (which is treated as an indicator of satisfaction); and d) *satisfaction with twelve aspects of stay*. Researchers have concluded that 12 items could help researchers to understand and summarize the satisfaction of students during their stay in Erasmus experience:

- Courses at the university
- Professors

- University facilities
- Local language courses at the university
- Sufficiency of information prior to your studies abroad
- Sufficiency of information while studying abroad
- Help from International Office at the university
- Financial situation
- Contacts with local students
- Contact with the host country's culture
- Social life
- The atmosphere of the city and country where the university is located

1.2.Purpose of the Study

Identifying expectation and satisfaction levels of the students attending Erasmus programs are crucially important in terms of correction and development efforts of the program. In view of the importance and usage of Erasmus mobility, the maın purpose of this study is to identify the priorities of incoming and outgoing Erasmus students' university preference among the ranked items. The study first gives a general profile of the students who experienced Erasmus mobility and then examine their priorities remained behind their decisions.

2. Methods

In this research, rank-order scaling emerged from the social sciences in an attempt to measure or order attributes with respect to quantitative attributes or traits.

2.1.Participants

In total 175 outgoing and 39 incoming Erasmus student respondents were included in the study. Both two groups are roughly representative for the Hacettepe University Erasmus Mobility Program general population in terms of incoming and outgoing status.

2.2.Data Collection Tool, and Data Collection Process

This study aims to define who prefers Erasmus mobility program and their priorities for Erasmus mobility. Demographic information was gathered to give a general profile of the students who experienced Erasmus mobility as well as open ended question was used to learn these students' views related to Erasmus and mobility experience. Rank-ordering judgement was used to examine the priorities of the Erasmus students. The priorities chosen for 11 rank-ordering judgements based on a research Erasmus Students Network (Krzaklewska and Krupnik, 2006). Based on rank ordering judgements design, whereby each priority statement was ordered based on

respondents choice. All respondents were thus presented 11 ranking judgements with given statements. The task was to rate the priorities of the presented statements on a scale of 1 to 11 where 1 indicated the 'higher priority' and 11 indicates the 'lower priority'.

Researchers have conducted an Erasmus Mobility Survey aims to learn about students priorities of choosing an Erasmus university who enrolled in Hacettepe University. It has been thought that survey will help researchers both understand students' selection priorities and improve university services for those who will study abroad in the future. For that purpose a main question has been asked students for visualizing priorities of Erasmus Students priorities: "What would your priorities be while selecting university if you had a chance to study abroad as an exchange student again? Please rate each statement from 1 to 11 (1 is the highest priority, 11 is the lowest priority)".

2.3. Data Analysis

Demographic data were given via percentages and graphs to define who prefers Erasmus mobility abroad and then the results of rank-order scaling is given. Scaling provides a mechanism for measuring abstract concepts. A rank order scale can also be referred to as a nonmetric scale (Torgensen, 1958; Turgut and Baykul, 1992). Respondents evaluate numerous objects at one time and objects are directly ranked with one another as part of the measuring process. Rank-order scaling gives the respondent a set of items and then asks the respondent to put those items in some kind of order. The "order" could be something like preference, liking, importance, effectiveness, etc. This can be a simple ordinal structure such as A is higher than B or be done by relative position (give each letter a numerical value as in A is 10 and B is 7). For instance, researchers could present five items and ask the respondent to order each one A-E in order of preference. In Rank-Order scaling only (n-1) decisions need to be made (Torgensen, 1958; Turgut and Baykul, 1992).

Rank-ordering methods have mainly been applied to the problem of comparing or maintaining standards across different tests or examinations that have been marked in the usual way. An assumption within this is that the resulting scale is, in some situations, more valid than the raw score scale that results from frequency analysis. Rank-order judgments of Erasmus students priorities from the same students create the scale that replaces basic frequency analysis results(Torgensen, 1958; Turgut and Baykul, 1992).

Gathered data were scaled using rank-order judgments and the complete data matrix from Thurstone's law of comparative judgment case III. equation. Primarily, the frequency equation values were ascertained from students' rank-order judgements, and the frequency matrix was formed using these values. The proportion matrix was found by stemming from the frequency matrix. The z values that corresponded to ratio

matrix elements were identified and the formation of the unit normal variance matrix was put into effect. Values that belonged to each column were added to the bottom line of the unit normal variance matrix and the mean of each z value in the column was calculated to find the scale values. In order to move the starting point of the axis to the lowest z mean values, the scale values were sequenced by adding the lowest z mean value's absolute value to all values.

3. Results

Student mobility is a key issue in providing excellence in European education. Making a success of mobility is crucial for institutions, and of course for the students themselves. It is believed that incoming and outgoing Erasmus students' preferences will give some clues to universities so that each institution provide better opportunities. Erasmus student mobility is a unique personal experience for students who have a new opportunity to develop both their academic and non-academic skills.

Concerning gender, 63,4 % of our outgoing students and %79,5 of our incoming students are female and 36,6 % of our outgoing students and %20,5 of our incoming students are male. This two ratio mirrors the tendency incoming and outgoing students does not differ much according to gender.
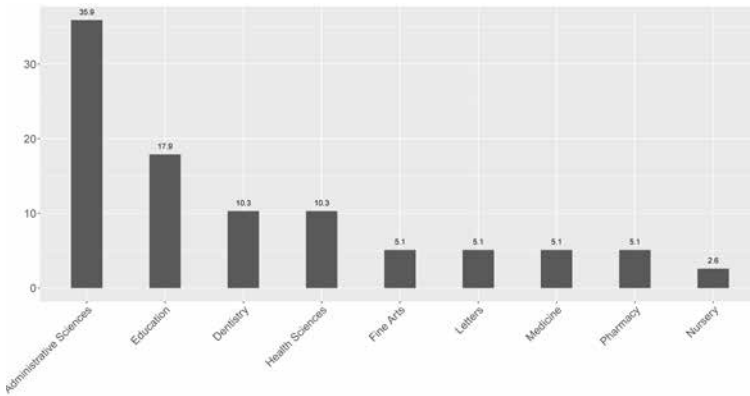
**Figure 2. The Distribution of Study Program for Incoming Students**

Figure 2 shows the distribution of study program for incoming students. According to the Figure 2, the most popular faculties among incoming students were observed as follows: administrative/management sciences (35,9%), education (17,9%), health sciences (10,3%), dentistry (10,3%), fine arts (5,1%), letters (5,1%), pharmacy (5,1%), medicine (5,1%) and nursery (2,6%). With a closer look to the findings based on incoming students current faculties, medical studies and business/administrative studies have initial proportion across incoming students. This findings shows us that

incoming students prefers social sciences and health sciences as an exchange students.
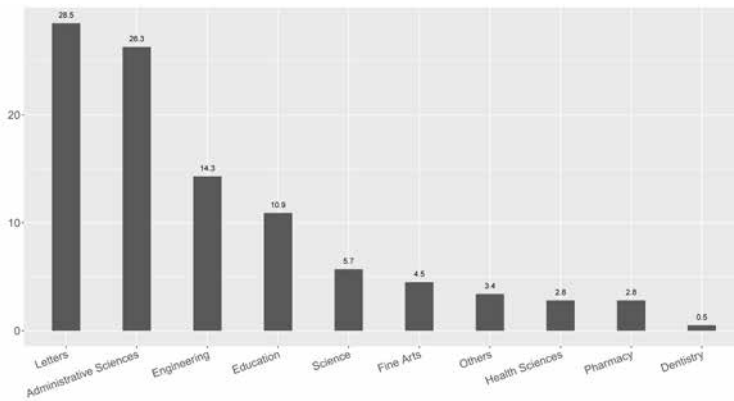
**Figure 3. The Distribution of Study Program for Outgoing Students**

According to the Figure 3, the most popular faculties among outgoing students were as follows: letters (28,5%), administrative/management sciences (26,3%), engineering (14,3%), education (10,9%), science (5,7%), fine arts (4,5%), pharmacy (2,8%), health science (2,8%) and dentistry (0,5%). With a closer look to the findings based on outgoing students' current faculties, letters and business/administrative studies have initial proportion across incoming students. Similar to incoming students, findings show us that outgoing students prefers social sciences as an exchange student.
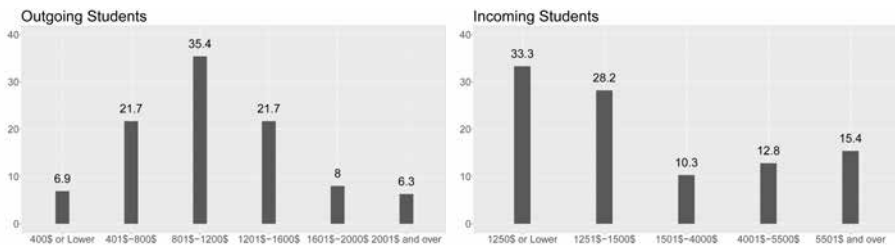
**Figure 4. Monthly Income of Incoming and Outgoing Students**

Figure 4 summarizes the monthly income of incoming and outgoing studens. Figure 4 shows that 35,4 % of outgoing students described their family's income between 801 $ -1200 $ which is the highest proportion among all outgoing students. Approximately 80 % (27,1+35,4+21,7) of outgoing students have income between 400$ and 1600 $. 33,3 % of outgoing students described their family's income 1250$ and lower which is the highest proportion among all incoming students. Approximately 62 % (33,3+28,2) of outgoing students have income up to 1500 $. The scaling differ-

ence between incoming and outgoing student income values depend on the average economic income difference between Europe countries and Turkey.
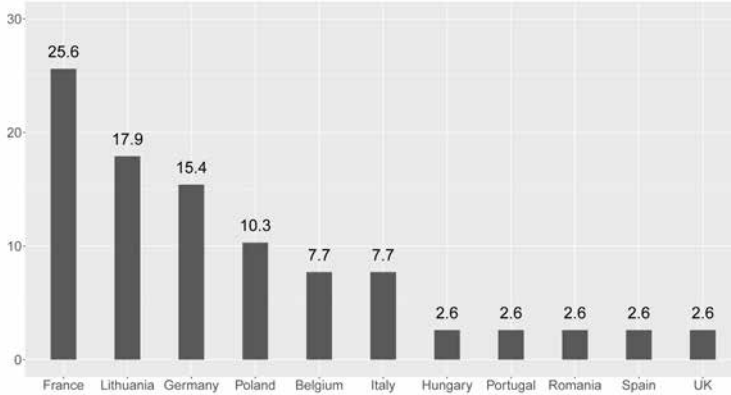
Figure 5. The Distribution of Incoming Students

Figure 5 summarizes the distribution of incoming students. Figure 5 shows that respondents who prefers Hacettepe University as an incoming students are located in France (25,6%). France was followed by Lithuania (17,9%), Germany (15,4%), Poland (10,3 %), Belgium and Italy (7,7%) and so on.
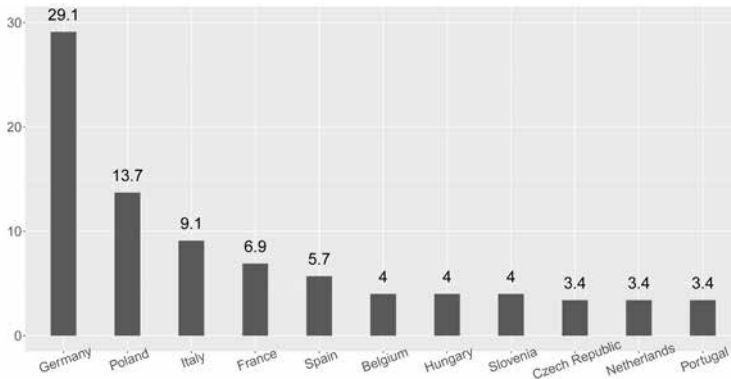

Figure 6. The Distribution of Outgoing Students

Figure 6 summarizes the distribution of outgoing students. Based on findings shown in Figure 6, outgoing students firstly prefer Germany (29,1%). Germany was followed by Poland (13,7 %), Italy (9,1 %), France (6,9 %), Spain (5,7 %) and so on. The share of students expressing the highest proportion of country selection is partic-

ularly high in Germany is more related to the findings with faculty preferences as a social sciences.
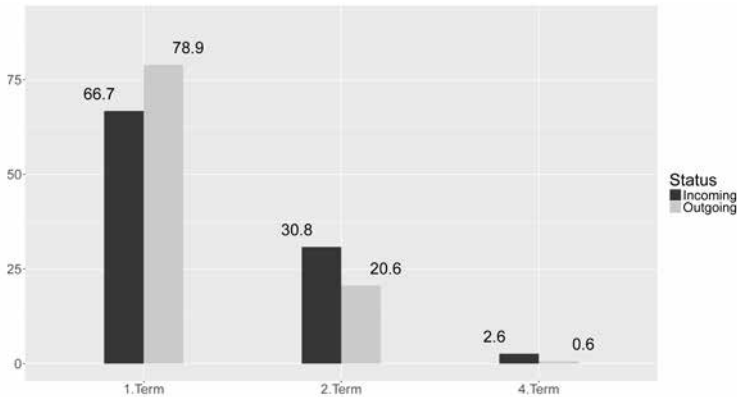
Figure 7. Desciptive Statistics of Incoming and Outgoing Students by Academic Term

Figure 7 summarizes the desciptive statistics of incoming and outgoing students by academic term. Figure 7 shows that most students spent an average of one term abroad as an exchange student. Based on findings, 66,7 % of incoming students and 78,9 % of outgoing students spent one term as an exchange student.

Table 1. Rank Ordering Scaling Findings

Judgements	Scaling Value		Ranking Value	
	I	O	I	O
The atmosphere of the city and country where the university is located	0,221	0,289	1	1
Social life	0,059	0,248	6	2
Financial situation	0,067	0,186	4	3
Professors	0,088	0,171	3	4
Guidance of International Office at home university	0,033	0,155	7	5
Sufficiency of information prior to your studies abroad	0,018	0,154	8	6
Local language courses at the university	0,006	0,122	10	7
Country Culture	0,062	0,116	5	8
Contacts with local students	0,000	0,105	11	9
Courses at the university	0,013	0,003	9	10
University facilities	0,098	0,000	2	11

I=Incoming Students, O=Outgoing Students

The rank-order scaling results shown in Table 1 indicated that both incoming and outgoing students preferred 'the atmosphere of the city and country where the univer-

sity is located' as priority while selecting university if they had a chance to study abroad as an exchange student again. Contrary to incoming students 'university facilities' choice, outgoing students preferred 'social life' as a second priority. Moreover, as it is indicated in findings, outgoing students lowest priority is the 'university facilities' judgments. This finding shows the huge difference of incoming and outgoing students priorities.

According to the open-ended questions, it has seen that most outcome students had positive attitudes towards Erasmus mobility program and expressed beneficial effects of Erasmus mobility. Even more some of them stated that their life has changed because of their Erasmus mobility experience. Outcome students stated that Erasmus mobility experiences advanced their advantages on finding a better job or a scholarship from a foreign country, receiving acceptance from universities abroad, gaining social skills and making international friends. The views on Erasmus mobility has changed when it comes to income students who came to Hacettepe University via Erasmus mobility program. Some of the income students expressed their satisfaction of their experience at Hacettepe University because of perfect running procedures and kind welcoming. On the other hand some of income students criticized about the complaint concerning the lack of information and staff ignorance. Some of income students had in trouble because of limited information they received.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the study demonstrates that the majority of incoming students from Europe to Hacettepe University under Erasmus programs and Hacettepe students who participated in Erasmus programs in Europe consist of female students. In addition, most of the incoming students' fields of studies were administrative sciences while outgoing students' majors were literacy. The research also reveals that most incoming students preferred programs in Faculty of Administrative Sciences while most outgoing students preferred the Faculty of Letters. The rest of the students' majors range in Education, Health Sciences, and Dentistry for incoming students and Administrative Sciences, Engineering, and Education for outgoing students over 10 percent in total. These results parallel with European Union research results that the largest group of Erasmus students, higher than %20, was Business Studies and Management and this is followed by Engineering and Technology, Languages and Philosophical Sciences as well as Social Sciences and Law (European Union, 2014).

Examining the nationality of students who involved in Erasmus programs, the research indicates that students from France preferred Hacettepe University the most. On the other hand, outgoing students of Hacetepe Universty preferred Germany the most. The preference rate of these countries is also high in Europe. These results are parallel with European Union (2014) research that the most Erasmus destinations are Spain, France, Germany, the UK and Italy. These countries cover the %63 of the total

Erasmus population. In addition most students spent an average of one term abroad as an exchange student.

A rank ordering scaling method was developed and applied through both incoming and outgoing students in order to specify the factors in preferring universities if they had another opportunity to select the universities they will go under Erasmus. According to the rank ordering scaling findings; incoming students prioritized the university related factors while outgoing students prioritized the factors related social environment.

In general both groups did not prioritize the courses but the professors. The underlying reason was discovered by interview questions indicating that the professors' ability to speak their language was viewed as vital by students. This significant finding suggests that professors should develop their language skills in order to attract students to their universities. Financial condition and expenses are prioritized by both incoming and outgoing students. So, students wish an increase with the financial support of Erasmus program from the authorities. The students ranked the activities of International Office in middle. However, they touched on the importance of the International Office in terms of orientation, guidance and transferring credits.

Another result of this study is outgoing students' positive feedbacks on Erasmus experiences. Students stated that Erasmus mobility experiences enhanced the possibility of finding a better job or a scholarship from a foreign country, receiving acceptance from universities abroad, gaining social skills and making international friends. Prior researches confirmed this findings as Erasmus mobility has an positive effects on job opportunity, employability of young graduates, personal growth, making international networks (Bracht et al. 2006; European Union, 2014; Sigalas, 2009).

The findings of the study draw important conclusions and recommendation for the implementers;

First, some of income students expressed with the lack of information and staff ignorance. Also, some of income students had in trouble because of limited information they received. Welcoming students and orientation programs plays vital role in order to overcome these problems. The Erasmus organizers should be more organized and acts more professional to welcome Erasmus students and provide relevant guidance not only for academic but also for social and accommodation issues. No matter how they are treated in future, first impression shapes the perceptions of the Erasmus students when they first reached to country and university.

Second, outgoing students express that they find significant opportunities for their future career. By traveling abroad, and experiencing different cultures, students expand their visions. This created better opportunities for them. However, they need professional support to plan their future. Being young and lack of experience in international may create failures for the students. Especially, their process of decision

making should be supported by the authorities.

Finally, the problems student face relates the diversity issues. The time period is too short to gain experiences about the culturally sensitive issues. Most students stay one semester under the program and this time period is not enough to gain relevant experiences on diversity issues. Therefore, the authorities should organize training activities on life through diverse societies and culturally diverse universities. This will help students to overcome problems they would face in future.

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