

# The Experiences of Students of Nursing Department Studying Abroad Through the Erasmus Exchange Program: A Qualitative Study

## Abstract

**Aim:** This study was conducted to determine the program-related experiences of nursing students, studying abroad through the Erasmus exchange program.

**Methods:** In the study, phenomenological design from qualitative research methods was used. The sample included 10 students participating in the Erasmus exchange program during nursing undergraduate education between 2008 and 2016. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview form with 7 open-ended questions between November 2017 and February 2018. The analysis process included coding the data, arranging themes, and identifying and interpreting results. Nvivo 10 program was used for analysis. Necessary permissions were obtained for the study.

**Results:** Five main themes and 50 sub-themes were reached: definition of being an Erasmus student, reasons for their selection, positive aspects, negative aspects, and contributions related to Erasmus experiences. The participants also produced 9 metaphors in animal, human, fruits, things, and process categories. The students stated that they experienced adaptation problems due to the language barriers, and they had difficulties regarding the grant and accommodation. They stated their positive experiences like professional contribution, seeing new places, and having fun.

**Conclusion:** As a result, the Erasmus exchange program was beneficial for students' academic language improvement and knowing new cultures and countries contributed to their social life.

**Keywords:** *Abroad experience, Erasmus exchange program, nursing, qualitative research*

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## Introduction

The Erasmus exchange program has remained popular among students nowadays and has been the gateway to abroad for many students. It is a program initiated by the European Union in 1987 to provide opportunities for university students to realize themselves in areas such as education, work experience, and sportive activity and was planned to continue until the end of 2020.<sup>1-3</sup> It offered opportunities such as education, internship, and grants for students studying in higher education institutions.<sup>1</sup> It has also increased the cultural competencies of the students and encourages cooperation between universities.

Turkey joined the Erasmus exchange program in 2004, and the demand for the program has increased day by day in our country. There are different fields of study within the scope of the Erasmus exchange program. The nursing department is located in the "Nursing and Midwifery" area. As of May 2018, students from 24 universities were sent from the nursing department, which was included in the 2017 projects within the scope of Mobility (Erasmus program) by Higher Education. From the start of the Erasmus program until May 2018, nursing students of 94 universities went abroad.<sup>2,3</sup> The Erasmus exchange program has provided the opportunity for professional practice as well as theoretical knowledge for the nursing department. The Erasmus exchange program has enabled nursing department students to gain information about the care of people in different cultures by strengthening their communication with their colleagues in other countries.<sup>4</sup> In addition, it has guided nursing department students to create a vision and mission related to their profession.

<sup>1</sup>This study was presented as an oral presentation at the First International Fourth National Cultural Nursing Congress held in Şanlıurfa on October 21-24, 2017.

Cite this article as: Demir Avcı Y, Kırca N, Günbayı İ. The experiences of students of nursing department studying abroad through the erasmus exchange program: A qualitative study. *J Educ Res Nurs.* 2022;19(1):26-32.

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Received: August 31, 2019  
Accepted: May 4, 2020



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Erasmus internship is a matter of great interest for many researchers. There are plenty of studies in the literature on this subject.<sup>5-7</sup> In a study conducted to determine the factors affecting the travel of nursing and midwifery students abroad, it was determined that cultural competence and language improvement are important in terms of creating job opportunities.<sup>5</sup> In a systematic review, health care students stated that the positive aspects of being an Erasmus student were traveling, getting to know other cultures, and learning about the health systems of other countries.<sup>5</sup> In a qualitative study investigating the cultural, personal, and professional development experiences of nursing students, it was determined that 4 themes were formed by coding the expressions of 23 students who went to 14 different countries with the exchange program in Europe and outside of Europe. These themes are overcoming barriers to communication, caring culture, professional achievements, difficulties experienced, and the importance of the guide. It was determined that these themes were similar to the literature.<sup>6</sup> In addition, Erasmus students stated that they gained positive personal gains such as a sense of sharing, getting to know themselves, learning about other cultures, and increasing their level of tolerance.<sup>8</sup> Solving the problems of living in a different country, belonging to a group, creating learning opportunities, and developing self-confidence are among the other positive aspects.<sup>9</sup>

It was also found that the Erasmus exchange program increased positive feelings toward the European Union as well as personal development.<sup>5,10</sup> The difference between the Erasmus exchange program and other programs was that it gave grants (free money) to students, which was the most important feature that distinguished it from international student mobility, which was a very costly process. In a study, it was determined that the satisfaction level of the students regarding the grant given in the Erasmus exchange program was high.<sup>7</sup>

The Erasmus exchange program has had both positive and negative effects on students. In the systematic review, language barrier and separation from the family were determined as negative situations.<sup>5</sup> In the study by Siles Gonzalez et al.<sup>10</sup> adjustment problems, differences in the education system, and different curriculum practices related to the nursing profession were the negative conditions that affected Erasmus internship. In another study, it was determined that the factors that prevented nursing and midwifery students from making a study abroad plan were cultural sensitivity, job opportunities, language, and financial problems.<sup>11</sup>

Many students go abroad with the Erasmus exchange program. Although there are many resources about education abroad, written resources that can guide students are limited. Information about the destination country, city, and school is limited to the shares made on the internet and social media. Another problem is that the communication with the students who went abroad with the Erasmus exchange program did not continue after they graduated. The experiences of the students on this subject cannot be transferred to the students who would go abroad. Limited information about international mobility can be obtained from the International Relations Office of the universities. It was observed that these problems were experienced and it was decided to carry out this study.

### Purpose of the Research

The aim of this study was to understand and interpret the experiences of the nursing department students who went abroad with the Erasmus exchange program. For this purpose, the research questions were stated as follows:

### Research Questions

1. How do the nursing department students who have gone abroad with the Erasmus exchange program define Erasmus internship and what are the reasons for choosing Erasmus internship?
2. What are the opinions of the nursing department students who have gone abroad with the Erasmus exchange program on the positive and negative aspects and contributions of Erasmus internship?
3. What do the nursing department students who have gone abroad with the Erasmus exchange program think being an Erasmus student like? Why?
4. What are the suggestions for nursing students who have gone abroad with the Erasmus exchange program to students who are considering going abroad?

### Material and Methods

#### Design and Sample of the Research

In the current study, phenomenology design, one of the qualitative research methods, was used. The phenomenology design is one of the qualitative research designs that aim to reveal the meaning of the lived experiences of the participants on the phenomenon rather than the phenomenon itself.<sup>12</sup> In the phenomenology design, as in the qualitative research designs, the purposeful sampling method based on volunteering is used. In the purposive sampling method, it consists of participants from whom rich information can be obtained about the phenomenon whose cause is known in line with the purpose of the research.<sup>12,13</sup> In qualitative studies, it is not possible to generalize with the sample size to the population. The subject the research focuses on the experiences of the nursing department students who went abroad with the Erasmus exchange program and the sample size that can be reached may vary.<sup>12</sup> In the literature, it is recommended that the sample size in phenomenology studies should be between 4 and 25 people.<sup>13</sup> During the study period, 12 students went abroad with the Erasmus exchange program. Two students did not want to participate in the study due to time problems. Thus, the sample of the study consisted of 10 students who participated in the Erasmus exchange program during their undergraduate education in nursing at a state university in Turkey between the academic years of 2008 and 2016. The interviews were done between November 2017 and February 2018. The department where the research was carried out sent the first 2 Erasmus students to Finland in the fall semester of 2008-2009. In the following years, students were sent to Finland, Romania, Portugal, the Netherlands, and Greece (Table 1).

#### Data Collection Method and Tools

The open-ended semi-structured interview form of the study was created by 3 researchers (first researcher; research assistant, second researcher; lecturer, and third researcher; professor with multiple publications on qualitative research methods). Due to the nature of qualitative research, the individual interview method based on a semi-structured interview form was chosen because it gives the

**Table 1. Socio-demographic Characteristics of Nursing Student (N=10)**

Characteristics	n
Gender	
Women	9
Men	1
Class	
Second grade	1
Third grade	3
Fourth grade	6
Host country	
Finland	4
Romania	2
Portugal	2
Greece	1
Holland	1
Department of Nursing fundamentals	
Public Health Nursing	5
Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology Nursing	2
Department of Child Health and Diseases Nursing	1
Department of Internal Medicine Nursing	1
Department of Psychiatric Nursing	1
Type of interview	
Face to face	5
Video phone	5
Age (mean ± SD)=26.9 ± 2.9	
SD, standard deviation.	

researcher flexibility and freedom in the study. Another benefit of this method is that it gives freedom for the researcher to ask probe questions to encourage participants.<sup>14</sup> In the creation of the questions in the interview form, the literature was taken into account, along with the answers to the pre-interview questions by the students of the nursing department who participated in the Erasmus exchange program.<sup>4-13</sup> Interview form consisted of 7 questions. Questions consisted of the definition of Erasmus internship, why they chose to be an Erasmus student, positive experiences while being an Erasmus student, negative experiences while being an Erasmus student, contributions of Erasmus internship, what the students thought being an Erasmus student like and Why? and the suggestions by Erasmus exchange students for the students who considered going abroad. Probe questions were also asked during the interview. A voice recorder was used to record the interviews with the permission of the participants. In addition, a demographic questionnaire containing the socio-demographic data of the students and informed consent was used. The demographic questionnaire consisted of 6 questions about age, gender, class, language level, which country they went to, and the field of nursing.

### Data Collection Process

Data were collected by individual interviews. The interviews were carried out in a special room in the Faculty of Nursing. All interviews were conducted by the first and second researchers. Before the interview, the participants were called, and the appropriate day and time were determined via planning. Since 5 interviewees lived outside the province, the interviews with them were conducted with a smartphone. Informed consent was signed by the participants before the interview started, and an audio recording was made with the permission of the interviewees to collect information. In addition, stories about the experience of Erasmus students were recorded and in-depth interviews were conducted. The interviews lasted about 30 minutes.

### Data Analysis

Nvivo 10 software program was used in the analysis of the data.<sup>15</sup> The interviews of participants recorded by the researchers were transcribed. The data obtained through interviews in the research were analyzed by content analysis method. Content analysis consisted of data reduction, coding of data, classification of data, and interpretation of data.<sup>12</sup> The data obtained from the audio recording were coded and reported in the software. Individual interviews were conducted to increase the internal validity of the research.<sup>12</sup> Themes were formed in the content analysis. Integrity was ensured by controlling the relationship between the sub-themes under the main themes and the relationship of each theme with the others. The codes and themes obtained from the study were arranged, and the findings were defined and interpreted. Five themes were identified in the study. In addition, sub-themes were created (Table 2).

In order to ensure the internal reliability (consistency) of the research, all the findings were given directly without comment. In addition, the researcher and 2 faculty members experienced in qualitative research carried out separate coding on the data obtained during the interview. The consistency ratio (Cohen's Kappa) was calculated. (Kappa: .812;  $P < .000$ ). The reliability of the evaluations was found to be very high.<sup>16,17</sup> A Cohen's Kappa coefficient of  $<0.0$  indicates no agreement, between 0.0 and 0.20 a very low agreement, between 0.21 and 0.40 a low agreement, 0.41 and 0.60 are interpreted as moderate agreement, 0.61 and 0.80 as good agreement, and 0.81 and above as very good agreement. In order to increase the external reliability of the research, data collection tools, raw data, the coding carried out during the analysis phase, and the perceptions that form the basis of the report were submitted to an outside expert for a confirmation review.

### Ethical Dimension of Research

Before the research was conducted, approval was obtained from the clinical research ethics committee of Akdeniz University (Decision no: 97-174). In addition, the participants were informed about the title, the purpose, the duration, and the form of the study. In order to understand the data to be obtained from the interview better, it was explained that the audio recording would be carried out in the research. The participants were told that their participation in the research was on a voluntary basis and their names would never be mentioned. The students participating in the research were coded as S1, S2, S3, ..., S10. After the participants stated that they would participate in the research voluntarily, they were asked to read and sign the consent form. Participants outside the province signed the research consent form and sent it via e-mail.

Table 2. Experiences of Nursing Students About Erasmus Exchange Program (N=10)

Themes	Sub-themes	Number of Sub-themes
Definition of Erasmus internship	Great possibility and opportunity n=4, a privileged process n=2, cultural ambassador n=1, traveling while studying n=1, learning new things and cultures n=1, developing both in business and education n=1, new places exploring n=1, language and professional development n=1, meeting of different cultures n=1	9
Reasons for choosing Internship	Working abroad n=2, seeing Europe n=2, seeing new places n=2, improving language n=1, defining different cultures n=1, improving yourself n=1, seeing different countries and language practices n=1, academic career reference n=1, curiosity n=1, professional experience n=1	10
Positive aspects of Erasmus internship	Professional contribution n=6, having fun n=4, seeing new places n=3, experience n=, improving English n=2, being positive and taking time for yourself n=1, making friends n=1, cultural experience n=1, seeing telemedicine applications n=1, professional experience n=1, development of problem-solving ability n=1	11
Negative aspects of Erasmus internship	Language barrier n=4, problem with grant n=3, accommodation n=3, food difference n=2, money transfer problem n=2, difficulty in reaching school n=2, visa procedures n=2, course credit mismatch n=1, weather conditions n=1	10
Contributions of Erasmus internship	Language improvement n=8, knowing different cultures n=3, traveling to different countries n=3, increasing self-confidence n=2, reference for graduate education n=2, professional experience n=1, milestone n=1, making friends n=1, participation in social activities n=1, positive effect on diploma grade n=1	10

## Results

In this section, there are themes, sub-themes, and metaphors produced about the experiences of nursing students participating in the Erasmus program. The demographic data of the nursing department students are shown in Table 1, the themes obtained from the experiences are shown in Table 2, and the results of the metaphor analysis are shown in Table 3.

Telephone video communication was established with 5 students. Individual and face-to-face interviews were carried out with others. Students had been to Finland, Romania, Portugal, Greece, and the Netherlands. Nine of the students were females and 1 was male. Students attended their internship in the fields of Public Health Nursing (n=5), Child Health and Diseases Nursing (n=2), Women's Health and Diseases Nursing (n=1), Internal Medicine Nursing (n=1), and Psychiatric Nursing (n=1) (Table 1).

### Theme 1 Defining being an Erasmus program student

The statements of the participants regarding the main theme of "the definition of being an Erasmus student" were collected in 9 sub-themes (Table 2). The sub-themes reflected the positive expectations of the participants from Erasmus internship. In the interviews about the definition of Erasmus internship, most of the participants

defined being an Erasmus student as "great opportunity and opportunity." A student stated: "I think being an Erasmus student is a great opportunity for students who do not have the possibility. When they meet with other students, they try to interpret their own education system (S1)."

Five of the participants described being an Erasmus student as a "privileged process." A student stated: "... Erasmus internship is a privileged process. I say privileged because I felt privileged when I went with Erasmus (S4)."

### Theme 2 Reasons for choosing Erasmus program internship

The opinions of the participants related to the main theme of "reasons for choosing Erasmus internship" were collected in 10 sub-themes (Table 2). Most of the participants stated their opinions under the sub-themes of "working abroad," "seeing Europe," "improving the language," and "seeing new places." All of the sub-themes consisted of positive expressions. Some students stated: "... I have a mind to work abroad. How are the opportunities abroad? How are the finances? How are the working conditions and patient opportunities? I am wondering about these (S3)." "Seeing Europe is the first thing for me (S5)." "...I don't know if I will have the opportunity to go to Europe. I want to get this opportunity... (S2)."

Four participants stated their opinions on the sub-themes of "developing the language" and "seeing new places": "You know, their foreign language was not English, but I had to speak English there (S3)." "It would help improve my English. There was a desire to see people from different cultures (S5)." "I wanted to see new places (S7)." "... Another reason is that I wanted to improve my speaking because I studied English preparatory school in high school (S6)."

### Theme 3 Positive aspects of Erasmus internship

The opinions of the participants regarding the main theme of "Positive aspects of being an Erasmus program student" were collected in 11

Table 3. Metaphor Analysis

Object	Definition of Metaphor	Nursing Student	n
People	Travelers, passenger, child	S1, S2, S3, S8	4
Animal	Dove, bird, swallow	S5, S6, S9	3
Furnish	Lamp	S10	1
Thing	Watermelon	S4	1
Process	Changing	S7	1

sub-themes (Table 2). Most of the participants stated their opinions on this theme under the sub-themes of “professional contribution,” “seeing new places,” and “having fun.” In the interviews, the majority of the participants stated their most positive experience in the Erasmus program as “professional contribution.” A student stated: “... It was a good experience for me. Because I didn’t work in such a field. It was a good experience for me to go to the patient’s home and care (S8).” Participants stated that the most positive experiences were “seeing new places” and “having fun.” Some students stated: “Living in a foreign country, trying to be like one of them in a different culture was both a fun and a full experience (S9).” “... There were students from all over. We were having parties in the evenings as Erasmus students. There were various clubs and we joined them (S6).” “... We had fun not only here, but also at homes and having fun (S10).”

#### Theme 4 Negative aspects of Erasmus program internship

The opinions of the participants regarding the main theme of “Negative aspects of being an Erasmus student” were collected under 10 sub-themes (Table 2). Most of the participants stated their opinions on this theme under the sub-themes of “language barrier,” “problem with the grant,” and “a place to stay.” Four students stated about their language barrier and 3 students had negative experiences with grants and accommodation. Three students stated that they had a language barrier. The students stated: “Since I did not understand the Finnish language, from time to time, when they were speaking and the speech was prolonged, the sleepiness would collapse as if they were listening to a fairy tale ... (S8),” “... This year, the European Union cut the grants, ... which meant fewer students at universities. It caused problems such as sending or sending it for a shorter period of time (S6),” “I didn’t have any problems other than finding a place to stay, I sorted it out anyway (S7).”

#### Theme 5 Contributions of being an Erasmus student

The opinions of the participants regarding the main theme of “Contributions of being an Erasmus student” were collected under 10 sub-themes (Table 2). Most of the participants stated their views on this theme under the sub-themes of “language improvement,” “recognition of different cultures,” and “traveling to different countries.” In the interviews, almost all of the participants stated that being an Erasmus student had a positive effect on language improvement, academic success, and social aspects. The common view on their academic success and positive social impact was language improvement. Some participants stated: “My language has improved. My English has improved. They thought us a basic Portuguese course (S10).” “As far as I knew, they had the opportunity to work. Socially, I met people from different languages and civilizations. Apart from working, we had the opportunity to be together. You know different cultures and people (S7).” “... Apart from that, I also traveled to other countries. Belgium, Germany (S5).”

When asked what they thought being a student in an Erasmus exchange program like, students produced metaphors of “child,” “traveler,” “dove,” “bird,” “swallow,” “change,” “lamp,” and “watermelon.” They stated: “Being an Erasmus student is like a little kid who sees the sea for the first time in his life. What you do there, how you live, who you ask for help, what is the end of the place you are in, an obscurity that you do not know and cannot see (T1),” “I think it is like being a traveler. The traveler is conveying something that exists. You are transferring something that exists. You do this yourself (S2),” “... I

think it is a dove. The dove represents peace. Dove lands on a branch of a tree. Erasmus students represent peace. They can go anywhere, they can land on a branch. It is enough to ask, it is enough to know a little language (S5),” “I think it is like a bird. Because it’s freedom. It could be a bird with a broken wing. He or she may not be able to fly where he or she wants, but an Erasmus student is a bird that has the opportunity to fly (S6).” Others stated: “I think of change. Because you take your own culture to the country you go to. At the same time, you bring the culture there to your country. Your horizons are opening. What do I know, while the sea used to be big enough for you, now you are wondering about the oceans..... (S8),” “I think it is something like a candle. But we have a proverb that the candle does not give light to the bottom. What did they call it? The never ending candle, rather than the candle? It could be something like a gas lamp. The lamp illuminates. They also enlighten themselves (S10),” “My teacher, it is like a watermelon falling from a donkey. After that, as they say, his ascension is at peace. Why is it so empty when going abroad but it comes equipped when coming back home? He comes to peace. He gets to know people from different cultures and returns peacefully.”

#### Discussion

The Erasmus exchange program encouraged students’ academic, professional, and individual development as well as provided students with different experiences related to their profession. In the study, nursing department students stated the definition of Erasmus internship with positive sentences such as opportunity, a privileged process, cultural ambassador, learning, self-development, and meeting of different cultures. The national agency defined Erasmus internship as a program that enabled students to gain new skills, strengthen their personal development, increase employment opportunities of individuals, and provide education and training.<sup>3</sup> The results of the study showed that the program reached its purpose. The Erasmus program enabled students to gain a universal perspective as well as individual views and experiences.

Another theme was the positive contributions of the Erasmus student exchange program (Table 2). The results of this theme were related to the personal contributions of abroad to students. The most mentioned sub-themes of this theme were seeing new places, language development, getting to know different cultures, and professional experience. In a study about the Erasmus program, the students of the nursing department stated that the Erasmus exchange program contributed to their personal and professional development. It was found that the results of the Erasmus internship in studies abroad were similar to our study.<sup>11,18-20</sup> When we scrutinized the studies done in Turkey, the benefits of this program were easy and cheap travel opportunities abroad, learning different cultures, and increasing academic and professional career opportunities.<sup>8,21,22</sup> There are also positive aspects of the Erasmus internship such as gaining a universal perspective, personal development, improving language skills, taking a role in the promotion of the country, being a model for the students who will benefit from the program, and observing the differences.

In this study, the most basic difficulties faced by the students of the nursing department who went abroad for the Erasmus exchange program were the inadequacy of their language levels and the difficulty in communicating. The reasons such as the lack of common language use between the countries included in the Erasmus exchange program, the fact that English was not spoken as a foreign language in the countries visited, and the foreign language level of Erasmus

students was not at a good level might be among the reasons for the language barrier. In this study, the challenges experienced by the students regarding the curriculum, the incompatibility of the courses (ECTS The European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System), and the problems in the course equivalence might cause the students to have to take more courses. Other negative aspects were stated as difficulties in the bureaucratic process, dealing with the procedures by the students, and not paying the grants on time. In addition, difficulties in finding accommodation, transportation difficulties, inadequacy of coordinator assistance, indifference to mobility, and limited bilateral agreements between countries. Similar to this study, in the studies done so far, it was determined that the reasons for the communication difficulties related to the Erasmus internship were that the students did not comply with the determined study plan and could not adequately communicate with the coordinator.<sup>23,24</sup> In order to minimize the communication problem, all students who passed the exam related to the Erasmus exchange program could conduct research on the languages of the countries they would visit. Nursing department students could learn words that enrich communication such as “good morning, good afternoon, how are you?” to facilitate communication with patients.

Language barrier, which is one of the sub-themes of negative aspects of the Erasmus internship, one of the themes of our study, was the main problem for all Erasmus students. There might be certain problems for nursing students to receive education in a different language. Language barriers and poor communication skills should be reduced to minimize this problem. The language problem was more important for nursing department students than other Erasmus exchange students. Not only was it an alarming threat to patient safety<sup>23,24</sup> it could also be defined as one of the main challenges facing the nursing profession.<sup>23,25</sup> Insufficient language skills would create difficulties in communicating with both staff and patients in clinical practice. Before participating in the program, all students who had a right for the Erasmus program of the universities or especially the students of the nursing department might be required to attend language training. Improving listening, speaking, and writing skills in these language trainings can be effective in solving this negative situation. It can help students express themselves more easily.

Another issue that nursing department students cared about in this study was grants. In the study, the problems faced by the students of the nursing department were the failure to pay the grants on time and the absence of work permits, even part-time, in the countries they went to. In the studies done so far, students stated that they had disadvantages related to financial resources and that the most important problem of their mobility abroad is financing.<sup>11,23,26,27</sup> Especially when European Union students study abroad, there are also restrictions on their studies. Erasmus students should be able to work in a part-time job, provided that they fulfill the activities stipulated in the mobility program, whether they receive a grant or not.<sup>28</sup> In order to solve this situation, it is necessary to discuss with the Erasmus program coordinator when and how much the grants will be given and to make necessary plans such as where, from whom, or from which institution/organization the economic support can be obtained in this process. It may be necessary to contact the coordinator of the destination country and clarify whether there are part-time working conditions.

To the question of “What do you think Erasmus internship is like? Why?” nursing students produced metaphors such as traveler, child,

dove, bird, swallow, lamp, watermelon, and change. All metaphors were a positive point of view. The metaphors produced were grouped into 5 categories (Table 3). One of the students thought being an Erasmus student is like a “dove” because the dove symbolizes peace and love. A peace environment is of great importance in strengthening communication between countries. In order for international communication to be easy, people must be at peace, love, and value each other. War environments affect all sectors. One of the aims of the Erasmus exchange program is to strengthen the communication between the countries of the European Union.<sup>2,3</sup> Erasmus students also undertook the task of cultural ambassadors in ensuring international peace. The student dove may also have thought of it as a cultural ambassador. The cultural embassy could play an active role in ensuring intercultural interaction and communicating with participants from different countries.

Another student who participated in the study thought being an Erasmus student is like “change.” Change was a very important concept for people. Seeing different countries and interacting between cultures contributed to students’ worldviews, professional, and individual development. The program’s contribution to the language improvement of students could also help them expand their horizons. Change played a key role in adapting to different cultures. The effect of the exchange could provide individual gains such as problem-solving, taking responsibility, and acting independently for the student benefiting from the Erasmus exchange program.

#### Limitations

The research had some limitations. Due to the fact that some of the students participating in the research were out of the province, there were difficulties in reaching the students. This prolonged the data collection process. Due to the nature of qualitative research, in face-to-face interviews, besides the verbal expressions of the participants, the way they said, gestures and facial expressions allowed the communication to be deeper. It was thought that this was not a problem for the study, since communication with the students continued in the periods before the study. In addition, data were collected by making smartphone calls with some participants. Since smartphone calls were carried out via the internet, it was thought that it made communication difficult from time to time due to the poor internet speed, loss of internet access, and decrease in image quality.

#### Conclusion

The 5 main themes of the study, the definition of the Erasmus internship, the reasons for choosing the Erasmus internship, the positive aspects of the Erasmus internship, the negative aspects of the Erasmus internship, and the contributions of the Erasmus internship, and many sub-themes were reached. Traveler, child, dove, bird, swallow, lamp, and change were metaphors produced by students. The students participating in the study stated that they experienced adaptation problems, especially due to the language barrier, and that they had difficulties with grants and accommodation. In addition, students stated their positive experiences such as professional contribution, seeing new places, and having fun. In the study, it was understood that the Erasmus exchange program was beneficial for the academic language improvement of the students and getting to know different cultures and new countries contributed to them in the social field.

Based on the results of the study, the following suggestions were presented to students who would go abroad with the Erasmus exchange program.

- Faculties and coordinators should inform students about life abroad.
- Interviews should be done with students benefiting from the Erasmus exchange program.
- Information sharing days with students' experiences should be organized.
- Students should learn about the culture, climate, language, accommodation, transportation, and expenditure of the country they would visit.
- Students should participate in all events in the countries they visit within the scope of the program and take with them clothes and solid food (as it reflects our culture, such as Turkish delight, Turkish coffee) that they may need.
- Students should research places to visit before going.
- Students should take booklets introducing Turkey.
- In case questions about our country are asked, students should read books about history.
- Students should improve their English prior to going abroad.
- Students should have high academic achievement at school.

**Ethics Committee Approval:** Ethics committee approval was received for this study from Clinical Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Medicine, Akdeniz University (Decision no: 97-174).

**Informed Consent:** Written informed consent was obtained from students who participated in the study.

**Peer-review:** Externally peer-reviewed.

**Author Contributions:** Concept – Y.D.A., N.K.; Design – Y.D.A., N.K., İ.G.; Data Collection and/or Processing – Y.D.A., N.K.; Analysis and/or Interpretation – Y.D.A., N.K., İ.G.; Literature Search – Y.D.A., N.K.; Writing Manuscript – Y.D.A.; Critical Review – Y.D.A., N.K., İ.G.

**Declaration of Interests:** The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

**Funding:** The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

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