

Developing an Entrepreneur Mindset through Erasmus: Hacettepe University Case

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THE ERASMUS PROGRAMME serves as one of the important tools for higher education students to develop their interpersonal skills. It forms a part of their lifelong learning period, not only in formal but also in nonformal and informal learning. During the Erasmus period students develop interpersonal skills through formal education and training by attending lectures/practicals, writing essays, doing projects, and through self learning. In addition to this they acquire certain competences through nonformal and informal learning, such as living in a different environment, dealing with a new culture and people, solving accommodation issues, etc. All these activities have a major role in fostering entrepreneurial spirit among the students since they create further experiences after their formal education. This study examines how the satisfaction of Hacettepe University outgoing Erasmus students can be broken down into assessments referring to broader aspects of the students' entrepreneurial thinking during the Erasmus period. For this purpose, the expectations of 408 students who benefited from the Erasmus Exchange Programme were compared to the level of satisfaction after completing the Erasmus Programme. The survey was conducted with 51% of the total outgoing Erasmus students who completed their Erasmus period between the years 2006–2009. Their expectations were examined under three headings; social skills, career building skills, and EU harmonisation. The results indicate that the entrepreneurial mindset in terms of social and professional life was increased by the Erasmus experience.

INTRODUCTION

After the Lisbon strategy designed to make the European Union 'the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world

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capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, and respect for the environment by 2010,' the European Commission set up a new strategy called Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. A part of this strategy, 'An Agenda for New Skills and Jobs,' is planned to modernize labour markets and empower people by developing their skills throughout their lives with a view to increasing labour participation and better match labour supply and demand, including through labour mobility. According to the report, *New Skills for New Jobs*, anticipating and matching labour market and skills needs, education and training systems must generate new skills to respond to the nature of the new jobs, which are expected to be created, as well as to improve the adaptability and employability of adults already in the labour force (European Commission 2010).

At the same time, the European Union wants to develop greater social cohesion within and between its nations, as is clearly pointed out in many statements such as this. 'In a world of ever-increasing opportunities for exchange, it is essential to prevent misunderstanding and to stem the reflexes towards intolerance from taking root: intercultural dialogue, exchange projects, meeting and working together, actions to promote tolerance, understanding and respect for others, and projects to combat racism and xenophobia have therefore become a greater priority than ever.' (Viviane Reding, quoted in Stronkhorst 2005.) Hence, 'better internationally and interculturally equipped human resources' are most likely the added value for students, lecturers, institutions, nations, and the European Union. One of the important tools for the EU to achieve this goal is the mobility of the labour force. And, the Erasmus programme is the most important student exchange program that has changed university customs and the life for many students in this regard since 1987. This EU funded programme has a triple objective of: increasing the mobility on the EU labour market, increasing the quality of the European universities through cooperation, and building 'European citizenship.' In the framework of the programme, in almost 20 years, more than 1,500,000 students have travelled to pursue a period of a maximum one-year of study in another European country (Diana 2008, 47).



Erasmus students study their own field (formal theoretical learning, curricular learning) during their Erasmus period in the host institution. They also have many different types of experiences in the host environment, which may be accepted as informal learning (extra curricular learning, informal social and active learning), and their subject specific knowledge, skills and competences as well as generic skills are developed. Generic skills are becoming an important subject for the education of a student. The commonly accepted definition is that generic skills are 'those transferable skills which are essential for employability at some level for most', and the phrase 'generic skills for employability' is now in common usage in policy and research (Sanguinetti 2004, 1).

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When we look at the personal attributes of generic skills for employability: Being self manager, cultural sensitivity, accepting responsibility for own actions, showing leadership, communication with goals and creativity are some of them (Sanguinetti 2004, 1–2).

The importance of entrepreneurship as one of the generic skills to be taught beginning in schools and continuing through life is widely accepted today. One of the indicators of this importance on the European level is that the European Commission launched a new programme called 'Erasmus for Young Entrepreneurs', which aims at helping new entrepreneurs acquire relevant skills for managing a small or medium-sized enterprise by spending time in an enterprise in another EU country. It contributes to improving their know-how and fosters cross-border transfers of knowledge and experience between entrepreneurs (<http://www.erasmus-entrepreneurs.eu>).

At the heart of entrepreneurship are imagination, creativity, novelty, and sensitivity. The entrepreneur creates something new in society, something novel, that meets a need that is latent in consumers (Rogene, Buchholz and Rosenthal 2005, 307).

Entrepreneurship is seen as the identification and exploitation of opportunities. The focus is no longer on 'organisational emergence' but rather, more generally, on the emergence of a new activity, which does not necessarily have to be associated with the creation of a new entity or new company. This notion coincides with the notion of entrepreneurship as an 'entrepreneurial spirit' or 'entrepreneurial initia-

TABLE 1 Distribution of outgoing Erasmus students

	2004/5	2005/6	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9
Hacettepe University	34	129	196	306	304
Turkey	1142	2852	4438	7119	9111

[106]

tive.' Entrepreneurial spirit may be defined as the aptitude of an individual or social group to take risks investing in an enterprise as an adventure. This adventure is the grasping of an opportunity that concerns something new, creative, value-adding, using and combining various resources (International Entrepreneurship 2008, 7–8).

We can say that the 'entrepreneurial spirit,' which may also be called the 'entrepreneurial mindset,' is an innovative practice of identifying and creating opportunities, and then acting to manifest those opportunities in a productive way.

This study focuses on the informal learning part of the Erasmus period, and what we did was to determine whether or not a relationship could be found between this informal learning and the entrepreneurship mindset.

METHODOLOGY

Hacettepe University has been participating in the Erasmus programme since the 2004–2005 academic year. Until now, 969 Hacettepe students have spent a study period as an Erasmus student at different European universities. In terms of Turkish universities, Hacettepe ranks 5th in Erasmus student mobility (table 1).

The data for this study was collected using a questionnaire developed by the International Relations – European Union Office of Hacettepe University. The questionnaire was conducted with 408 Erasmus outgoing students of Hacettepe University between the 2006–2007 and 2008–2009 academic years. This population was 51% of the total outgoing students between those years. The questionnaire consisted of a number of multiple-choice questions, questions with empty boxes for comments, and questions with a five-point Likert-scale. The first group of questions were multiple choice and sought to gain information about the respondents' gender, age-group, academic rank/faculty, and overall expectations, main problems and difficulties



they come across, etc. The second group of questions consisted of a series of items using a five point Likert-scale (not at all, not very much, some, much, very much) and were used to assess the importance and overall role of Erasmus in the respondents' social skills, career building skills and social inclusion (EU harmonisation). In order to analyze the collected data, PASW statistics software by SPSS corporation was used. The data were analyzed with descriptive statistics tests such as paired samples *t*-test, and comparing means. The skills, which may be part of an entrepreneurial mindset for Erasmus students, are listed below.

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Entrepreneurial Skills for Erasmus Students:

- 1 Understanding the behaviours, values and attitudes of people in a different society;
- 2 Becoming more tolerant of different social life styles;
- 3 Adjusting to a different culture;
- 4 Having interests in different social issues;
- 5 Believing in the necessity of student mobility among European Union countries;
- 6 Being informed of international career prospects;
- 7 Having the will to work/study abroad;
- 8 Reconsidering personal plans for the future;
- 9 Enhancing the level of self confidence;
- 10 Becoming aware of powerful and creative aspects of one's world;
- 11 Becoming a more assertive person;
- 12 Being willing to undertake responsibilities and fulfilling them;
- 13 Improving foreign language competency (reading, writing, speaking, listening);
- 14 Gaining further knowledge, skills and attitudes in your major;
- 15 Sharing common values of the European Union;
- 16 Believing in the necessity of institutional cooperation regarding educational issues among European Union countries.

Respondents ranked these items with a five-point Likert-scale as their indicating expectations before the Erasmus period and their satisfactions for the same items after the Erasmus period. The above 16-item list was grouped and analyzed under three headings as: social

skills, career building skills and social inclusion (EU harmonisation) (table 3).

FINDINGS

[108] The questionnaire was conducted with 408 individuals, 72% of whom were female and 28% male. In terms of degrees, 88% of respondents were bachelor (undergraduate, first cycle) degree students, 5% were masters (second cycle) level students and 7% were doctoral (third cycle) level students. In absolute terms, Germany was the country with the highest number of outgoing students (23% of respondents), and it is followed by France (10% of respondents), Poland (9% of respondents) and Belgium (7% of respondents).

The survey consisted of 58 items that describe expectations and satisfactions about students' experiences at the host university as an Erasmus student; 16 of them described the attainments that they gained from their experiences in the host country. Those 16 items represented the entrepreneurial skills of Erasmus students. In order to divide them into 3 categories – as personal skills, career building skills and EU harmonization skills – the collected data were analyzed by factor analysis.

Altogether 480 surveys were used in the factor analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett tests were used to prove the suitability of the datasets for the factor analysis. Factor analysis identifies different dimensions of items on the basis of Erasmus students' expectation and satisfaction scores.

According to the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin tests ($KMO = 0.921$; $p < 0.05$) it has been found that the data sets are suitable for factor analysis. The Eigen value was selected as 1 for the factor analysis for Erasmus students' data. Three factors obtained after the rotation explained 74 % of the total variance. They are as follows:

- 1 Personal skills (question numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, 14, 15, 16)
- 2 Career building skills (5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13)
- 3 EU Harmonization (11, 12)

For the relationship between students' entrepreneurial expectations and the level of their academic attainments, we applied the dependent *t*-test. According to the results we got $P = 0.005$ and $p < 0.05$



TABLE 2 Relationship between students' expectations and satisfactions

Entrepreneur skills	N	Mean	S	SD	t	p
Expectations	408	4.34	.546	406	2,844	.005
Satisfactions	408	4.42	.525			

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TABLE 3 Distribution of the mean percentages for the students' answers

Mean values (%)	Not at all	Not very much	Some	Much	Very much
Expectations	0.44	1.1	12.8	30.3	55.3
Satisfactions	0.42	1.25	8.9	29.4	60

value, which shows that there is a relationship between the two, and the $r = 0.442$ value shows that this relationship is linear, which means the level of students' satisfaction is as high as their expectations. It is clear that students' satisfactions have been met with a 4.42 mean value over 5.0, which is higher than their expectations with a 4.34 value over 5.0 (table 2).

In table 3, the mean of percentages indicates that both expectations and the level of satisfaction for the entrepreneurial skills are 'very much.' More than 55% of the students specified that level of expectations for the given entrepreneurial skills were 'very much', and the returns of these expectations are even more, with the 60% of students' satisfaction level.

The distribution of the expectation and satisfaction values for each skill is shown in table 4. As stated before, students ranked their level of expectations and satisfaction between the levels: not at all, not very much, some, much, very much. According to the results, more than the 50 % of the respondents answered the 'very much' level for each skill. As is shown in table 4, a majority of the respondents (60.3%) expected *having the will to work/study abroad*. Also, the majority of respondents (57.4%) expected that the Erasmus programme would make them more tolerant of different social life styles. The results show that, after the Erasmus programme, students met their expectations with 65.9% for *having the will to work/study abroad* and 63.2% of the respondents said that *they became more tolerant of different social life styles*.

In terms of career building skills, the results show that the ex-

TABLE 4 Distribution of the entrepreneurial skills of Erasmus students for the highest answered choice

Distribution of entrepreneurial skills	Expectations		Satisfactions	
	N	%	N	%
<i>Personal skills</i>				
Understanding the behaviours, values and attitudes of people in a different society	220	53.9	232	57
Becoming more tolerant of different social life styles	234	57.4	258	63.2
Adjusting to a different culture	230	56.4	248	60.8
Having interest in different social issues	192	47.1	202	49.5
Believing in the necessity of student mobility among European Union countries	228	55.9	270	66.2
Being informed of international career prospects	228	55.9	233	57.1
Having a will to work/study abroad	246	60.3	269	65.9
<i>Career building skills</i>				
Reconsidering personal plans for the future	223	54.7	244	59.8
Enhancing the level of self-confidence	270	66.2	293	71.8
Becoming aware of powerful and creative aspects of one's world	230	56.4	252	61.8
Becoming a more assertive person	237	58.1	255	62.5
Being willing to undertake responsibilities and to fulfil them	219	53.7	246	60.3
Improving foreign language competency (reading, writing, speaking and listening)	267	65.4	230	56.4
Gaining further knowledge, skills and attitudes in your major	204	50	189	46.3
<i>Social inclusion (EU harmonisation)</i>				
Sharing common values of the European Union	127	31.1	131	32.1
Believing in the necessity of instit. cooperation regarding educational issues among EU countries	159	39	171	41.9

expectations of students were high with respect to *enhancing the level of self-confidence* (66.2%) and also *improving foreign language competency (reading, writing, speaking and listening)* with 65.4%. Satisfaction levels of both skills were found to be 71.8% for *enhancing the level of self-confidence* and 56.4% for *improving foreign language competency (reading, writing, speaking and listening)*. Their second highest satisfaction level for the career building skill was *becoming a more assertive person* with 62.5%. Social inclusion is another factor that improves entrepreneurial skills. For this reason, in order to see the social inclusion (EU harmonisation) level of the students, we wanted to see how the Erasmus program helped them to *share common values of EU and to believe in the necessity of institutional cooperation regarding educational issues among European Union countries*. According to the results, expectation and satisfaction levels for these questions were not as high as either the personal or the academic entrepreneurial skills of the Erasmus students.

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However, the results show that the satisfaction level of the social inclusion (EU harmonisation) skill of respondents was higher than their expectations.

CONCLUSION

This paper examines how the expectation and satisfaction of Hacettepe University outgoing Erasmus students can be broken down into assessments referring to broader aspects of the students' entrepreneurial mindset during the Erasmus period. In this study case, personal skills, career building skill and social inclusion (EU harmonization) are focused upon in order to analyze the entrepreneurial skills of the students. It is found that students' entrepreneurial satisfactions are higher than their expectations when they finish their studying abroad.

The results of this study show that the Erasmus period has a positive effect on the development of entrepreneurial skills of students, which make them more employable. The Erasmus period contributes to the development of the entrepreneurial mindset, and this development may have some role in converting the students' theory and business planning into enterprise activity.

We know that this study is based on self-evaluation of the students. Therefore, it does not measure the actual behaviour of the students,

rather their own perception or intention. And, it should be perceptive and explorative to look at the Erasmus period from a different point of view, thus providing ‘food for thought.’

[112]

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