

THE IMPACT OF ERASMUS + PROJECTS IN TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH PROCESSES

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Abstract

Being able to speak more than one language is being paid enough attention to force individuals either to learn foreign languages during their formal education or to solve this problem within non-formal education. One of the restrictions to learning a second language is lacking an authentic environment where learners can practice their skills and test themselves. Erasmus+ programme is the largest strategy in which all programme countries of Europe are enrolling and getting their shares. Erasmus+ programme also enables schools to interact with each other by maintaining cross national collaboration. In addition to the priorities of the programme, language learning is also encouraged. The main purpose for this project is to evaluate language learning by means of Erasmus+ projects. The study is designed as a qualitative and simple literature review to evaluate students' and teachers' language learning activities in terms of Erasmus+ projects. The findings of the study have proven that participating in international projects and mobilities is strengthening the students' motivation in language learning. It can be suggested that creating authentic environments can help students' developing language skills. On the other hand, by collaborating with their colleagues; teachers can also enrich their abilities.

Keywords: Language Learning, English, Erasmus+.

Introduction

People have many interrelated needs and problems; whereas some of them also create new problems and needs as well. Considering that each of these problems and needs contributed to the development of humanity throughout the centuries; people tried some solutions to them and discovered new things. After a while, these attempts became necessary to be taught over generations. So that it can be stated that education mainly depends on the needs of society as these needs are the motivators for the education policies and strategies.

Considering the complexity of education as a theoretical study field; there are many sub-dimensions in it; like expenditure, policies, curriculum, classes, management, timing, technology integration, etc. Thus, it can be assumed that more than one expert should be ready to discuss the topic of education. First, we should consider the fact of education derives from the needs of a society; which enables us to discuss it with the help of sociological researches. Education is the basic tool of human development. Development of innate abilities, increment in knowledge & arts, and behavioral changes are brought about in humans by education only and he is made a civilized, cultured, and able citizen (Pal, 2021). In other words, education is an activity which goes on in a society while its aims and

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methods totally depend on the nature of that society (Bhattacharya, 2006). Second, people should be aware that the education system has various inputs such as students, teachers, materials, teaching strategies, schools, parents, etc. Thus, any education system can not be totally successful or ruined without the impact of these inputs. Because all these inputs play their vital roles while building a whole process depending on the educational context and each one of them is as essential as the rest.

Teachers and learners are trying different strategies to learn a foreign language and become fluent in the target language by applying various techniques. However, not all of them are successful enough to achieve these roles as well as, some also are prevented by different factors. Thus, course plans are more than important because teachers are always trying hard to engage their students during and after the classes. First both students and teachers should be well aware of the fact that English language is a study connected with all other subjects and all aspects of human life to enable people to live a fulfilled, free interaction and achievement in life. It involves a study of people in relation to their social, academic, economic, cultural, physical, and psychological lives (Ajoke, 2017). Teaching a language is essentially taught to communicate. Therefore, language teaching is to improve students' ability to communicate in both oral and written forms (Ampa, 2015). Learning, assimilating the science of the age we live in and more foreign language education in Turkey is one of the most important issues that need to be taken seriously (Demirel, 2013).

One of the unique ways of language teaching is to practice the target language in an authentic context. Thus, exploring the facilities within international context is essential for language learners. Erasmus + is an overall programme run by the European Union and creates practical grants for millions of students and teachers in Europe. Teachers and students can have mobilities to different countries and catch wonderful opportunities to practice their second skills.

Altıntaş (2021) studied Erasmus EFL exchange students' beliefs about their linguistic and academic competences before and after mobility. Results expose that students improve their reading, listening, grammar and vocabulary competences as a result of the Erasmus program and they feel more competent academically. Cantez (2020), studied Investigating the contribution of the European Union Erasmus Plus (Erasmus+) Youth Exchange projects to foreign language learning. The findings of the research reveal that according to the views of the participants EU Erasmus+ Youth Exchange Projects provide several benefits to participants in terms of improving foreign language level, and Youth Exchange projects have contributed to participants' English speaking fluency and foreign language learning motivation. Erdoğan (2019), studied The investigation of the linguistic and academic competences of the tertiary level exchange students with a special focus to the effects of their erasmus experience. By studying linguistic aspect of the Erasmus programme, it was revealed that the students developed self-confidence in using English after Erasmus experience. By studying the academic aspect of the Erasmus Programme, it was found that the students had the opportunity to compare Turkish Education System and European Education System, and they experienced adaptation problems to home institution after the programme. Also, the study aimed to observe to what extent Erasmus Programme managed to reach its goals from linguistic and academic points by relying solely on Erasmus students' remarks.

Kisa (2017) studied Turkish Erasmus students' perceptions about the use of English as a means of communication and their intercultural awareness in ELF (English as a lingua franca) communities. The findings reveal that various reasons such as visiting different cultures and improving language skills play an important role in promoting Turkish Erasmus students' participation in the program. The study also identifies various challenges and problems students faced before, during, and after their Erasmus experience. As a result of their study abroad experience, the participants acknowledge improving their linguistic knowledge and skills in English as well as vocabulary knowledge. Concerning the lingua franca status of English, English is considered as a world language used a contact language. As for the cultural aspect of the Erasmus, the participants agree raising their intercultural awareness thanks to their interactions with people from different cultures. Özdemir (2019) studied the effect of studying in elf context on Turkish erasmus exchange students' l2 english language proficiency development. The results of the study revealed three important findings. First of all, the participants improved their reading, listening, vocabulary and grammar English proficiency levels significantly after studying one

or two terms in the European ELF context. Secondly, pre-programme low (A1 and A2) and intermediate (B1) level students progressed more than upper-intermediate (B2) and advanced students (C1 and C2). Thirdly, the majority of the students who were at the B2, C1 and C2 sub-test L2 English levels either remained stable or went back home with lower proficiency levels. In addition to these major findings, the current study also provided pedagogical implications for the practitioners to consider, and suggestions for scholars who are interested in doing more in-depth research on studying in ELF context and its effects on English language acquisition.

Mulcar (2019), studied the role of erasmus plus ka2 mobilities in learners' intercultural sensitivity and attitudes towards English language. The findings of the research indicated that intercultural sensitivity of students increased and their attitudes toward learning English improved as a result of the intercultural interactions during Erasmus Plus KA2 mobilities. The research also showed as the third finding that intercultural sensitivity and attitudes toward learning English were correlated, which means, the more interculturally sensitive a student is, the better attitudes he/she has toward learning English. Besides, it was revealed that the mobilities promoted curiosity, openness to other cultures, empathy and self-confidence in terms of intercultural sensitivity and an awareness about the benefits and advantages of learning a foreign language, personal satisfaction, self-confidence, the ability to use opportunities, being more goal oriented and personal awareness in terms of attitudes towards learning English. Yardımcı (2014) studied the effect of Erasmus exchange program on attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language. The results of the study indicate that living and studying in a multicultural environment either strengthened their already positive attitudes towards learning EFL or helped the participants to develop positive attitudes.

The main motivation for this study is to reveal the impact of Erasmus + projects in language teaching-learning activities prior to reviewing current literature. Thus the study consists of current findings of previous studies dealing with the impact of Erasmus + projects in language teaching-learning process.

Method

In this part, the design of the study, data collection procedures and analysis of the study have been given. The research study mainly aims to reveal the impact of Erasmus + projects in English language teaching – learning activities. So that the study depends on the previous literature and this is designed as a qualitative literature review. The three basic types of literature reviews are narrative reviews, qualitative systematic reviews, and quantitative systematic reviews (meta-analyses) (Green, Johnson & Adams, 2006). The literature review also helps to outline the diverse and interdisciplinary areas of research. In addition, literature review is an excellent way to synthesize research results to show meta-level evidence and reveal areas that require further research. It is a key component of constructing theoretical frameworks and conceptual models (Snyder, 2019).

Data Collection

The current literature was searched prior to the topic of this research and all applicable databases including Google Scholar, Turkish Thesis Archive, Proquest etc. were also applied to collected data. Some of the ideas were supported with direct citations and given in references as well.

Analysis of Data

The data collected were analyzed in a descriptive manner to draw a general overview of the impact of Erasmus + projects in English language teaching – learning activities prior to current literature.

Findings

An Overview of Erasmus + Programme

The Erasmus+ programme aims to boost skills and employability, as well as modernizing Education, Training, and Youth work. Erasmus+ supports transnational partnerships among Education, Training, and Youth institutions and organizations to foster cooperation and bridge the worlds of Education and work in order to tackle the skills gaps we are facing in Europe. It also supports national efforts to modernize Education, Training, and Youth systems. Erasmus+ brings together seven existing EU programmes in the fields of Education, Training, and Youth; it will for the first time provide support for Sport (Erasmus+ Programme Guide, 2020).

Erasmus+ is the EU Programme in the fields of education, training, youth, and sport for the period 2021-2027. Education, training, youth and sport are key areas that support citizens in their personal and professional development. High quality, inclusive education, and training, as well as informal and non-formal learning, ultimately equip young people and participants of all ages with the qualifications and skills needed for their meaningful participation in a democratic society, intercultural understanding, and successful transition in the labor market. Building on the success of the programme in the period 2014-2020, Erasmus+ strengthens its efforts to increase the opportunities offered to more participants and to a wider range of organisations, focusing on its qualitative impact and contributing to more inclusive and cohesive, greener and digitally fit societies (European Union, 2021).

Each year, EU announces the following call for proposal and identifies the key actions and priorities by maintaining the necessary budget in order to achieve its goals. On the other hand the commission also defines priorities in accordance with the latest developments in world wide education policies. In figure 1 below; the programmes' basic statistics are given (European Union, 2021).

Figure 1

Basic Statistics fo Erasmus + Programme



The Impact of Erasmus + Projects in Language Teaching – Learning Activities

Multilingualism is one of the cornerstones of the European project and a powerful symbol of the EU's aspiration to be united in diversity. Foreign languages have a prominent role among the skills that will

help equip people better for the labor market and make the most of available opportunities. The EU has set the goal that every citizen should have the opportunity to acquire at least two foreign languages, from an early age. The promotion of language learning and linguistic diversity is one of the specific objectives of the Programme. The lack of language competence is one of the main barriers to participation in European education, training and youth programmes. The opportunities put in place to offer linguistic support are aimed to make mobility more efficient and effective, to improve learning performance and therefore contribute to the specific objective of the Programme (EU, 2021).

Thus, Erasmus + projects are mainly designed to promote the students' second language skills by both creating unique chances to practice their language capacities and motivating them to develop their multilingual presence. Besides, the time spent to practice language during the education and training periods may be considered as a sound investment in the future employment opportunities. In this sense, even though the world has obviously gone global, Europe has a more intricate set of relationships within itself due to its history, religion, cultures, languages, and current European Union affairs (Mulcar, 2019).

One of the specific objectives of the Erasmus+ Programme is to promote foreign language learning and linguistic diversity (European Commission, 2020). According to the Erasmus+ program guide (2020), the lack of language competence is one of the main barriers to participation in education, training, and youth programmes. Various actions that are mentioned in the literature review of the research have been carried out to support the personal and professional development of young people (Cantez, 2020). A study conducted by Learges (2021) revealed that Erasmus + projects has numerous advantages in language teaching. Among the key findings are that taking part in an Erasmus+ mobility:

- Facilitates an engagement with other languages in more informal, unregulated settings, shifting the focus from an exam-based learning culture to a communicative one
- Leads to reduction of 'language anxiety' and increases the learners' linguistic confidence, including a willingness to make mistakes
- Increases the likelihood of participants working in an international context or seeking opportunities abroad
- Can have a fundamental impact on the social and cultural integration of minority groups, including the traveller community.

Linguistic diversity represents a real challenge for a harmonious coexistence in Europe and in today's globalised world. Language learning has, therefore, become an undeniable asset of competitiveness in a multilingual European area, with 24 official European Union languages and more than 60 minority languages. However, we live in global society where education goes beyond the boundaries of one educational institution or even one country. In the European Union (EU) context, the mobility of teachers and students and their multilingual competence have always been a major concern and are at the heart of the EU policy toward the integration of its country members.

Hundreds of thousands of EU citizens, especially young people, have had to use and practice foreign languages in the European mobilities they have taken part in. This is a desirable effect to observe as foreign language competence is seen as a key factor in education, training, and youth programmes in that it ensures the efficiency and effectiveness of mobilities (European Commission, 2020).

Finally, EU's education, training, youth and sports student Erasmus Plus Program, which is a mobility program, not just only allow the transition to employment but also supports language acquisition and cultural integration as well. It is very beneficial for the participants by supporting them and creating the feeling of being an EU citizen. It can be said that it has proven to be beneficial. Both students of the program positive effects on their cultural and linguistic development and self-definition, and considered to have contributed.

Conclusion and Recommendations

English teachers should feel responsible for promoting effective teaching. However, too many of them rely on uninteresting textbooks that focus students' attention on grammatical structures, and on practice in isolation; too many of their classroom activities are based on teacher-talk and student-listen routines. These practices are unlikely to lead students to develop a genuine interest in learning English (Cheung, 2001).

In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning environment, teachers might be the sole link for learners to connect with the target language and culture. How teachers present or interpret the material has a large part to influence learners' engagement in the learning process (Chen & Chen, 2009). Music is the universal language of mankind' 'learning a foreign language is a boring task and takes a long time, and if teachers teach English without fun, e g., music or songs, it can be more boring and unbearable. Students who are taught in a creative and fun way, love, and motivation come to class (Farmand & Pourgharib, 2013).

One of the most important uses of learning styles is that it makes it easy for teachers to incorporate them into their teaching. There are different learning styles. Three of the most popular ones are visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic in which students take in information. Some students are visual learners, while others are auditory or kinaesthetic learners. While students use all of their senses to take in information, they seem to have preferences in how they learn best. In order to help students learn, teachers need to teach as many of these preferences as possible (Gilakjani, 2012). Some forms of music, such as pop songs, work especially well for teaching English language learners (ELLs). Because music is motivating, it allows the mind to "train attention" and sets these learning processes in motion. For teachers, this means that creating heightened attention in our classes by using music can create an atmosphere more conducive to learning (Lems, 2018). So using songs as a means of teaching can help teachers to redesign their courses prior to different types of intelligence.

This study has proven that Erasmus + programme has a positive impact on language learning. Perez-Vidal (2015) also argues that within the European strategy towards multilingualism, which has guided linguistic policies in recent years, 'Languages for all!' is the prevailing motto. This idea has been extremely well captured by one of the central planks in the strategy, the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach at primary and secondary educational levels, which has quickly become popular both top-down and bottom-up. Thus, promoting students' language learning by putting them into international projects is essential.

The European Commission's action plans for promoting language learning and diversity speaks of the need to build an environment which is favorable to languages (Doiz, Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2011). Thus, in the European Union (EU) context, the mobility of students and their multilingual competence have always been a major concern and are at the heart of the EU policy toward the integration of its country members (Užpalienė & Vaičiūnienė, 2012). So it can be concluded that Erasmus+ programme has a vital impact on students' motivation for learning a foreign language.

In general, foreign language skills bring about economic advantages for individuals in terms of positive earning differentials. Very good language skills are rewarded much more markedly than limited language knowledge. English has an undisputed economic usefulness in the European labor market, but it is not the only linguistic asset worth investing in; in some contexts, skills in other languages may be better rewarded. This emphasises the importance of teaching more than one foreign language in the education systems of European countries.

This study reveals the essential role of international projects in language learning-teaching activities. Prior to the findings of this research; these suggestions below are made;

- More students and teachers should be included in Erasmus+ programme.
- The study deals with the projects' direct impact; indirect impacts should also be studied.

- Cultural awareness should be analysed in language learning.

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