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## The ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility: The Perspectives and Experiences of Turkish ELT Academics

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perspectives and experiences of the Turkish ELT academics about joining ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility Program. Under the light of former studies and literature, this study attempts to investigate the preferences of the ELT academics for participating in the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility, to examine the contribution of the enrollment in this program to their professional development and home institution, and finally, to learn about the problems they faced during the mobility period(s). Purposive sample method was used to select seventeen Turkish ELT academics to participate in this study. The data were obtained through a triangulated approach, in which questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and reflective essays were administered to the participants. The findings revealed that apart from some problems experienced before and during the program, the Turkish ELT academics preferred to participate in the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility due to its positive impact on their professional development and their home institution.

### Keywords

ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility (TS), English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Professional Development, Higher Education Institution (HEI)

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## The ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility: The Perspectives and Experiences of Turkish ELT Academics

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*The purpose of this study is to investigate the perspectives and experiences of the Turkish ELT academics about joining ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility Program. Under the light of former studies and literature, this study attempts to investigate the preferences of the ELT academics for participating in the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility, to examine the contribution of the enrollment in this program to their professional development and home institution, and finally, to learn about the problems they faced during the mobility period(s). Purposive sample method was used to select seventeen Turkish ELT academics to participate in this study. The data were obtained through a triangulated approach, in which questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and reflective essays were administered to the participants. The findings revealed that apart from some problems experienced before and during the program, the Turkish ELT academics preferred to participate in the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility due to its positive impact on their professional development and their home institution. Keywords: ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility (TS), English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Professional Development, Higher Education Institution (HEI)*

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With the globalization, networking, economic integration and the Internet, English has become one of the symbols of our epoch and undisputedly it has had the position as a lingua franca of the world. The rise of English as a global language has a noticeable impact upon policies and practices in educational systems in around the world (Crystal, 1997; Nunan, 2003; Mauranen & Ranta, 2009). Due to the strategic and geopolitical status, Turkey has been under the influence of English and reflected this influence on its educational system as well. Teaching of English at all levels has had a great importance in the Turkish education system. The government has made a number of reforms on the curriculum, teaching methods, teacher training and teacher education programs (Doğançay-Aktuna, 1998; Doğançay-Aktuna & Kızıltepe, 2005; Kırkgöz, 2007). Education unity among the European Community has a significant role in the process of unifying Europe. Consequently, with the thoughts of strengthening a regular determined and democratic society, the education ministries of 29 European countries, opened up the unifying process in education by signing the Bologna Declaration in June 19, 1999 (Dolaşır & Tuncel, 2004). The aim of the Bologna Declaration is to create a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) based on international cooperation and academic exchange and to promote the European system of higher education in the world (Van der Wende, 2000). Turkey joined the Bologna Process after a Prague meeting held in 2001 and since then higher education has gained more attention in the country. As a signatory country, Turkey has followed all of the requirements for integration into higher education (Aydın, 2012; Mızıkacı, 2005). At this point, in the frame of the Bologna process, the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS) program has a great important role. As the *flagship* among the educational programs of the European Union, the ERASMUS program, which was launched in 1987, aims to establish a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by facilitating the mobility of university students and teaching staff

in both member and candidate countries (Teichler, 2002). The ERASMUS program includes some activities under three actions in higher education: (1) student mobility (SM) and staff mobility; (2) cooperation for innovation; and (3) support for policy reform. Promoting the mobility of university students and staff is one of the fundamental goals to be achieved by the European Union education program (Pineda, Moreno, & Belvis, 2008; Aydın, 2012). In the frame of the ERASMUS program, staff mobility for teaching is among the important actions of the program in terms of realizing ERASMUS purposes which aims at promoting the quality of higher education by the way of a pooling of intellectual competences and introducing a European dimension in the courses offered to who can not participate in Erasmus student mobility. Unlike student mobility, it is not boosted mainly for the benefit of mobile persons themselves; staff mobility for teaching is expected to contribute to both non-mobile and mobile students' learning. It develops the knowledge base of the departments besides the improvement of the curricula both at home the institution and the host institution (Delmartino & Beernaert, 1998; Enders, 1998; Enders & Teichler, 2005; Engel, 2010; Janson, Schomburg, & Teichler, 2009; Kreitz & Teichler, 1997).

Taking into consideration the importance of teaching English in the Turkish education system today, ELT academics working at English Language Teaching Departments in Turkey have an important opportunity to share knowledge and experience in another country and to update their professional knowledge by means of Teaching Staff Mobility (Richards & Farrell, 2005). Specifically, during the teaching period, the ELT academics broaden their experiences and their skills related to language teaching by improving their international and intercultural understanding. They can learn new teaching methods and discuss language teaching methods and contents with their colleagues, so they can review their own teaching methods in consideration of the practices at the host instruction. After returning, they can enrich the content of courses related to foreign language teaching at their home institution and use new teaching methods in their courses. They can develop curricula and research projects by inter-institutional cooperation as well. In addition to these, they are motivated and enthusiastic to be active for guiding instructors and students who want to participate in ERASMUS. In this way, they can contribute to promote internalization and modernization of the home institution.

## **Literature Review**

### **The ERASMUS Program**

The European Economic Community was established in 1950's and at first it touched upon educational matters only in the fields of vocational and the transition from education to employment. When Higher Education became to take part in European agenda, one of the first activities was to support student mobility. To that end, as a pilot program, the Joint Study Programs (JSP) was founded in 1976 and it remained in force for ten years. The JSP gave financial support for only one year to the networks of departments and some funds on a moderate scale to the mobility students. The JSP program was commonly successful in terms of building a beneficial academic and administrative environment for student exchange between cooperating departments of higher education institutions in different countries. Nevertheless, the limited time span of institutional support and extra expenses during the study periods constituted impediments for an extensive success (Bracht et al., 2006; Janson, Schomburg, & Teichler, 2009). Immediately afterwards, ERASMUS program began in 1987. Its name is not only the name of the Dutch humanist, Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus (1466-1536), but also acronym for European Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students.

The aim of ERASMUS is to increase the quantity of European higher education activities and to extend their scope. The main objectives of ERASMUS in higher education is

to: (1) increase the skills and employ ability of students and contribute to the competitiveness of European economy; (2) improve quality in teaching and learning, implement the Higher Education Modernization strategy in program countries and raise the capacity of partner countries; (3) streamline the international dimension in Erasmus+; and (4) support the Bologna process and policy dialogues with strategic partner countries. Specifically, this particular program attempts to modernize and to improve higher education across Europe and the rest of the world. It gives students and staff chances to improve their competences and encourage their employment prospects. Students at higher education institutions, higher education institution staff (academic and non-academic), and private companies can benefit from these opportunities.

### **The ERASMUS Program in Turkey**

With the Ankara Agreement in 1963, which aimed towards the accession of Turkey into the European Economic Community (EEC), in the process of integration into European Union, Turkey took a concrete step into the European Union and in the case of fulfillment the obligations defined by the European Economic Community (EEC), the negotiations for Turkey's full membership were started (Aktan & Sarı, 2010; Özkılıç & Haspolatlı, 2008).

The culture policy of the European Union has been based on the balance between preservation of national cultures and the development of a common culture. For this purpose, there is a necessity to pursue a common educational policy (Bakioğlu & Certel, 2010). Turkey submitted a proposal related to participating in the European Union Education and Youth Programs in Luxemburg in 1995. The council of the European Union determined some requirements for Turkey. Attempts to harmonize Turkey's policies with Europe's policies took the place of political agenda and were introduced to many constitutional reformation packages (Kaya, 2013). In the celebration of 800<sup>th</sup> anniversary of University Paris (Sorbonne Declaration, 1998), four-education ministers from Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom offered an idea. They stated that they *must strengthen and build upon the intellectual, cultural, social and technical dimensions of their continent* (Sorbonne, 1998; Harris, 2011, p. 64). Therefore Bologna Process officially started in 1999 with the signing of the Bologna Declaration. Bologna Process is a European reform process aiming in establishing a European Higher Education Area by 2010 (Van der Wende, 1999). Turkey participated in education programs of European Union as a candidate country at Helsinki Summit in 1999 and studies were started related to this issue. It took a long time to form the base and to complete legal process due to the uncertainty in economy and politics. Turkey joined the Bologna Process after the Prague meeting held in 2001 (Ağrı, 2006; Aktan & Sarı, 2010).

Turkey began preparation work in order to participate in the program in 2002 with *Framework Agreement* between the Turkish Republic and the European Community. Thus, Turkey started to benefit from the programs like the other candidate countries. For this reason, a governmental unit called the *Department of European Union Education and Youth Programs (Turkish National Agency)* was founded and preparation work started. During the preparatory period, the National Agency informed potential beneficiaries about the programs and also carried out a pilot scheme, which included student mobility and implementation of European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) at pilot universities (Aktan & Sarı, 2010; Tanyeri, 2006). After the preparation phase, Turkey gained the full participation in European Union education programs in 1 April 2004. The project led up to the participation of other Turkish universities in the program, and most of Turkish higher education institutions took part in the ERASMUS program during the last phase of the Socrates II. With the Lifelong Learning Program (LLP) in 2007, 90 Turkish higher education institutions have an Erasmus University Charter, which provide them the opportunity to participate in the ERASMUS Program. During the full

participation period, years from 2004 to 2007, Turkish higher education institutions sent 8,500 students abroad and received 2,534 students, while they sent 2,120 teaching staff abroad and received 925 teaching staff (European Commission, 2014). The Erasmus program has brought the universities and international cooperation into prominence, and gave support concerning the elimination of prejudice against Turkey during the negotiation period for its membership to the European Union. At this point, ERASMUS has served to both enhancing the quality of higher education institutions by giving opportunities for the beneficiaries in the educational area, and supporting to destroy prejudice among countries (Demirkol, 2013). According to the data gained by the Turkish National Agency, by the years 2010-2011, the number of students who went to Europe for study reached over 72,000. Besides, the number of the staff who went to Europe for teaching reached over 15,000 (Ulusal Ajans, 2015).

### **Teaching Staff Mobility (TS)**

Teaching Staff Mobility (TS) allows staff to spend a teaching period between 1 day - or at least 5 teaching hours - and 6 weeks at a higher education institution in another participating country. The minimum requirement for the teaching assignment is 5 teaching hours. The main aim of TS is to increase the quality of higher education by creating a pool of intellectual skills and introducing a European dimension in the courses offered to non-mobile students (Delmartino & Beernaert, 1998). The objectives of Teaching Staff Mobility are to: (1) encourage higher education institutions to broaden and enrich the range and content of courses they offer; (2) allow students who do not have the possibility to participate in a mobility scheme; (3) benefit from the knowledge and expertise of academic staff from higher education institutions and from invited staff of enterprises in other European countries; (4) promote exchange of expertise and experience on pedagogical methods; (5) to create networks between higher education institutions and with enterprises; and (6) motivate students and staff to become mobile and to help them in preparing a mobility period.

Teaching staff of higher education institutions and invited staff of enterprises can benefit from this mobility, and the grant provided to contribute to subsistence costs and to cover travel costs is always managed by the higher education host institution. The institution sending teaching staff (or inviting enterprise staff to teach) applies for ERASMUS mobility grants to its national agency, while the staff applies to their home institution or the inviting institution in case of enterprise staff. There are some arrangements that have to be made. The partnering higher education institution and/or enterprise must have agreed in advance on the program of the activities to be delivered by the visiting teachers (i.e., teaching program). Regardless, the activities of staff undertaking a teaching assignment should be integrated into the curricula of the host institution. The sending institution selects teaching staff of higher education institutions, while the host institution selects staff of enterprises. In the case of staff mobility from an enterprise to a higher education institution, the mobility period is arranged by an invitation of the higher education institution to the staff member of the enterprise. The higher education home institution always manages the grant. The interested teaching staff should contact the international office, and/or the ERASMUS office of the home institution, or the host institution in case of enterprise staff or the National Agency (European Commission, 2014a).

Based on these overviews, it can be indicated that ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility gives the opportunity to the academics to exchange experiences on teaching methods and enrich their pedagogical knowledge and instructional practices. Considering the knowledge related to teaching and learning language is experimental and in an uncompleted state, ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility may have the potential benefits on both Turkish ELT academics' professional development and their home institution.

### **Role of the Researchers**

The first author, Filiz Tuzun, is an English teacher at a state high school in Istanbul, Turkey. She has completed her MA at Bahcesehir University, Faculty of Educational Sciences, Department of English Language Education, on the topic: *ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility: From the Perceptions of Turkish ELT Academics*. This explanatory, single case study is a part of her master's thesis. The second author, Enisa Mede, is an Assistant Professor and the chair of the Department of English Language Teaching (ELT) at the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Bahcesehir University, Istanbul, Turkey. She is the supervisor of this MA thesis. The researchers took the consent and assistance of 10 state and 7 private universities from different districts in Turkey to get the ELT academics to participate in this study. The ELT academics participated voluntarily, and no incentive was provided for the participation. Each participant was provided with the background information, the purposes of the study, and assurance of confidentiality before they took part in the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, as well as before each wrote reflective essays.

### **Study Context and Method Review**

The present study explores the perceptions of the Turkish ELT academics about ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility Program. More specifically, it attempts to find out their preferences for the participation in ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility, to examine the contribution of the enrollment in this program to their professional development and home institution, and to learn about the problems faced during the participation in such mobility period(s). Within this scope, the following research questions were addressed in this study:

- (1) What are the preferences of the Turkish ELT academics for the participation in the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility?
- (2) What is the contribution of the enrollment of the Turkish ELT academics in ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility to their professional development?
- (3) What is the contribution of the enrollment of the Turkish ELT academics in ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility to their home institution?
- (4) What are the problems faced by the Turkish ELT academics during the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility?

### **Research Design**

An explanatory, single case study (Yin, 1984) was adopted as a research design for this study due to its utility and appropriateness. Since this study attempts to evaluate the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility program on the basis of the experiences and perceptions of the Turkish ELT academics, this particular research design was used considering the following. First, the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility Program is a bounded phenomenon. Second, the program is described in detail by the researcher. Third, the data is collected from multiple sources, namely, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and reflective essays. Fourth, the researcher organizes and analyses the data in a holistic way. Finally, the results are presented in the manner to benefit from the ERASMUS program.

## Sample Group

For the purposes of this study, purposive sampling techniques were used to collect data from a total of seventeen (N=17) Turkish ELT academics who participated in *ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility* in previous academic years. Purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling design; it attempts to elect units from a population to create a sample with the intention of making generalizations from that sample to the population of interest (Denver & Fraenkel, 2000).

We sampled 12 female and 5 male Turkish ELT academics instructors between the ages of 25 and 60 years old, with a teaching experience ranging from 6 to more than 20 years. In addition, 10 of the participants were working at state universities, whereas 7 were employed in private universities. As for their educational background, 13 participating academics had a PhD, while 4 had an MA degree in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT).

Prior to the data collection process, a consent form was sent to the state and private university administrators explaining the research ethics and purposes of the study. After getting their written approval, another consent form was sent to each participant briefly describing the scope of the study and explaining that the obtained data will be coded, remain confidential, and be used for research purposes only. As a result, all participants signed the consent form showing their agreement to take part in this study voluntarily.

## Setting

The present study was conducted at the Department of English Language Teaching (ELT) founded at the Faculty of Educational Sciences of 5 state and 5 private universities in Turkey during the first and the second semesters of the 2014-2015 academic years. The primary aim of this program is to train teachers who are to work at primary, secondary, and higher education institutions (both in public and private sectors), who are also equipped with basic knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to ELT, and who are able to internalize progressive views of the world and ethical values, understand the principals of a teaching profession, and are open to the innovations and developments of teaching English.

## Data Collection Tools

For the purposes of this study, data came from three different sources: (a) questionnaires; (b) semi-structured interviews; and (c) reflective essays.

To begin with, the questionnaire used in this study was adopted from the study on the professional value of ERASMUS mobility conducted by Schomburg and Teichler (2009). Specifically, it contained two sections. The first section (Section 1) aimed to collect demographic data related to the Turkish ELT academics such as gender, age, years of teaching experience, educational background, current work place, the host country visited for the ERASMUS program, the target group being taught, and the duration of their stay. As for the second section (Section 2), three statements about the effects of ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility were included with an attempt to obtain information about the Turkish ELT academics' preferences for joining this program, the contribution of this program to their professional development, and their home institution. There were a total of thirty-four items based on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1-*Strongly Agree* to 4-*Strongly Disagree* (see appendix A). The questionnaire was administered to seventeen participating Turkish ELT academics working at ELT departments, both in state and private universities in Turkey. Before the questionnaire was administered to the sample population, it was piloted with 7 randomly

selected ELT academics. The Cronbach's alpha value was found as .91, which demonstrated acceptable internal consistency reliability in the present sample (Gliem & Gliem, 2003).

Apart from the questionnaires, semi-structured interviews were conducted on one-to-one basis with 17 ELT academics to gain insights about their perceptions, preferences, and experiences during the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility program. The semi-structured interviews were comprised of four open-ended questions parallel to the items in the questionnaire. The questions were related to the preferences of the ELT academics in relation to joining ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility, its influence on their professional development as well as their home institution, and the potential problems they faced during the mobility program. The interviews were done in English over a period of three months (i.e., March-April 2014) and the length of each interview varied from 25 to 35 minutes. The participants gave consent, and their responses were recorded for analysis and interpretation.

Finally, the respondents were asked to write a reflective essay, which was based on one's own experiences; it was expected that someone write about herself/himself and her/his ideas (Ernest & Zac, 2012). In this study, all participants were asked to reflect on their experiences during the mobility program. They were provided with some prompts, such as their general viewpoints on joining the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility Program, its influence on their professional development as well as home institution, and the problems they had gone through during the mobility program. The length of each reflective essay was between 550-750 words.

## **Procedure**

The data obtained from the questionnaires were entered into and analyzed statistically via SPSS (version 20.0). Frequency analysis was estimated to provide a way to summarize the data in an understandable and clear way. To support the quantitative data, the qualitative data (gathered from semi-structured interviews and reflective essays) went through content analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The analysis process began with open coding of data, followed by inducing categories from these codes, which were then gathered under general themes for each set of data relating to a specific question. The categories and themes were subject to the checking of inter-raters. To identify the degree of inter-rater reliability, one native and one non-native speaker who are experts in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) identified themes from the codes. It emerged that the raters achieved close agreement on the general themes, apart from the different verbalizations of similar concepts.

## **Findings**

The following part presents the findings related to the preferences of the Turkish ELT academics for joining the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility Program, the contribution of this enrollment to their professional development and home institution, and lastly, the potential problems experienced during this program that are presented based on quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

### **Preferences for the Participation in the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility**

In an attempt to answer the first research question, which aimed to find out the preferences of the Turkish ELT academics for the participation in the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility, data were obtained through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and

reflective essays. The following table reports the frequencies for each item included in the questionnaire.

**Table 1.** Frequencies for the Preferences for Joining the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility

<i>EFL Instructors' Preferences (n=17)</i>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Existence of co-operative relations beyond my program/faculty.	41	35	24	-
2. Good personal relations to, or prior co-operation with staff of the host institution.	53	29	6	12
3. Recommendations of colleagues of my study area.	24	29	29	18
4. Innovative teaching strategies of the host institution.	12	35	41	12
5. My general interest in a visit to the host country.	59	18	18	6
6. My good command of the native language of the host country.	18	18	29	35
7. Making my knowledge available to a higher institution abroad.	65	24	6	6
8. Being able to link the teaching period abroad with research activities abroad.	47	24	24	6

According to this table, the participating academics (n=17) agreed (i.e., as a combination of *strongly agreed* or *agreed*) that their preferences for the participation in the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility were as follows: existence of co-operative relations beyond my program/faculty (76%, n=13), good personal relations to, or prior co-operation with staff of the host institution (82%, n=14), recommendations of colleagues of my study area (53%, n=9), innovative teaching strategies of the host institution (47%, n=8), my general interest in a visit to the host country (77%, n=13), my good command of the native language of the host country (36%, n=6), making my knowledge available to a higher institution abroad (89%, n=15), and being able to link the teaching period abroad with research activities abroad (71%, n=12).

On the other hand, the participating instructors disagreed only with the sixth item (i.e., as a combination of *strongly disagree* or *disagree*) regarding their good command of the language of the host country (64%, n=11). A possible reason behind this finding might be the fact that the ELT academics are already fluent speakers of English, which is the common language in the host countries, and thus, already have a good command of the language before their language.

Moreover, to complement the quantitative data obtained through the questionnaires, semi-interviews and reflective essays were analyzed to provide some qualitative evidence. When the Turkish ELT academics were asked about their preferences for the participation in the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility, they stated that they wanted to develop professionally by exchanging their ideas and experiences with colleagues from the same field, as well as by finding a chance to monitor the English performance of students studying abroad. One of the participants made the following comment:

[...] With my staff mobility visit, I had a chance to exchange ideas and experiences with my colleagues working at different institutions. This experience also helped me to monitor the English performance of students studying aboard. (ELT academic, Interview data, 24<sup>th</sup> March, 2015)

Similarly, the participating academics agreed that joining such a program helped them to learn about the motivation of learning English in another country and its reflection on the process of language teaching. In addition, being a part of this program also provided the participants with the opportunity to experience teaching in a different context, to collaborate in future research projects, and to enhance their professional network. The following two excerpts support these findings:

[...] The most important reason for me was to learn about the motivation of learning English and how it reflects on the language teaching in another country. (ELT academic, Interview data, 24 March 2015)

[...] My major preferences for the decision about joining the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility are to experience teaching in a different context, to collect data for research, to search for cooperation for future research projects, to enhance my professional network. (ELT academic, Interview data, 24 March 2015)

Furthermore, the data analyzed from the reflective essays revealed that during this program, the ELT academics discovered different teaching strategies of the host institution to be integrated in their own institution, experienced teaching in a different context, and enhanced their professional network about joint projects as shown in the following excerpts:

[...] I participated in the ERASMUS staff mobility to learn about different teaching strategies of the host institution that I can use in my own context. (ELT academic, Reflective essay data, 14 April 2015)

[...] By joining the mobility program, I gained experience in teaching English in different contexts and establish professional network for collaborating in various projects. “(ELT academic, Reflective essay data, 14 April 2015)

### **Contribution of the Enrollment in the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility to ELT Academics’ Professional Development**

In an effort to answer the second research question about the contribution of engaging in the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility on the professional development of the ELT academics, data were obtained through same data sources. To begin with, the frequencies for each item included in the questionnaire are displayed:

**Table 2.** Frequencies for the Contribution of the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility to the Professional Development

<i>The Contribution to Professional Development</i>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
9. Enhancement of professional/career perspectives	59	35	6	0
10. Contribution to getting a higher academic rank	12	12	65	12
11. Raise of income level	6	6	35	53
12. Extension of temporary employment contract	6	12	47	35
13. Taking over a high-ranking administrative position	6	6	47	41
14. Enhancing my international/intercultural understanding	71	29	-	-
15. Improving my professional/career perspectives	71	24	6	-
16. Improving research contacts	29	47	24	-
17. Broadening my pedagogical knowledge	53	35	6	6
18. Addressing disciplinary/theoretical discussions originating from partner country/countries	29	41	18	12
19. Developing new co-operation activities/ joint projects	41	47	12	-
20. Learning about structure of higher education in different countries	71	24	6	-
21. Designing study courses in different education programs	65	35	-	-
22. Discovery of quality assurance procedures for teaching and learning in different education programs	65	29	6	-
23. Knowledge about variety in education Systems	82	12	6	0

According to these findings, the participating instructors agreed (i.e., as a combination of *strongly agreed* or *agreed*) that the contribution of the participation in the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility to their professional development was related to the following concepts: enhancement of professional/career perspectives (94%, n=16), getting a higher academic rank (24%, n=4), raise of income level (6%, n=2), extension of temporary employment contract (18%, n=3), taking over a high-ranking administrative position (12%, n=2), enhancement of international/intercultural understanding (100%, n=17), improvement in professional/career perspectives (95%, n=16), improvement of research contacts (76%, n=13), broadening pedagogical knowledge (88%, n=15), addressing disciplinary/theoretical discussions originating from partner country/countries (70%, n=12), developing new co-operation activities/ joint projects (88%, n=15), learning about structure of higher education (95%, n=16), designing study courses in different education programs (100%, n=17), discovery of quality assurance procedures for teaching and learning in different education programs (94%, n=16), and gaining knowledge about variety in education systems (94%, n=16).

On the other hand, the ELT academics particularly disagreed (i.e., as a combination of *strongly disagree* or *disagree*) with the items regarding raise of income level (item 11) (88%, n=15) and taking over a high-ranking administrative position (item=13) (88%, n=15). A reasonable explanation for this finding might be the fact that the participation in this program is done on voluntary basis, which does not have much effect on the raise of income level or taking over a high administrative position.

Similar to the previous research question, semi-interviews and reflective essays were also used to provide some qualitative evidence regarding the contribution of the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility to the professional development.

To begin with, when the participants were asked about the potential contribution of the enrollment in the ERASMUS program to their professional development, they stated that enhancing international and intercultural understanding, improving academic and professional perspectives, as well as establishing future contacts for joint projects were among the main reasons. Considering these findings, three of the participants said:

[...] I simply joined the program to improve my international and intercultural understanding. It also helped me develop my professional and academic perspectives. (ELT academic, Interview data, 24 March 2015)

[...] Being a part of this program helped me to extend my international understanding, broaden my professional perspectives and start new research contacts for future projects. (ELT academic, Interview data, 24 March 2015)

[...] Joining the mobility program extended my horizon about intercultural understanding. It was also effective on improving my research contacts for conducting different projects. (ELT academic, Reflective essay data, 14 April 2015)

### **Contribution of the Enrollment in the ERASMUS Mobility to Home Institution**

With the purpose of answering the third question, which aimed to find out the contribution that the enrollment of the Turkish ELT academics in ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility had on the home institution, data were obtained through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and reflective essays.

As for the quantitative aspect of this question, the following table reports the frequencies for each item included in the questionnaire.

**Table 3.** Frequencies for the Contribution of the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility to Home Institution

<i>The Contributions to Home Institution</i>	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
24. Improving guidance/advice available to mobile students	53	29	18	-
25. Providing knowledge on other countries, Europe, etc.	47	35	12	6
26. Co-ordination of programs between home programs and partner programs	35	41	18	6
27. Provision of courses in a foreign language	12	35	35	18
28. Development new concepts and contents for study programs	35	47	6	12
29. Addressing issues comparatively	41	41	12	6
30. Use of publications in foreign languages	12	18	47	24
31. Providing knowledge on international relations or supranational organization	18	41	29	12
32. Setting up double degree programs	6	18	59	18
33. Development new teaching methods	18	35	35	12
34. Integration language courses into curriculum	12	12	47	29

According to this table, the participating instructors agreed (i.e., as a combination of *strongly agreed* or *agreed*) that the contributions of the participation in the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility to home institution were in accordance with improving guidance/advice available to mobile students (82%, n=14), providing knowledge on other countries like Europe, etc. (82%, n=14), co-ordination of programs between home programs and partner programs (76%, n=13), provision of courses in a foreign language (47%, n=8), the development of new concepts and content for study programs (82%, n=14), addressing issues comparatively (82%, n=14), use of publications in foreign languages (30%, n=5), providing knowledge on international relations or supranational organization (59%, n=10), setting up double degree programs (24%, n=3), the development of new teaching methods (53%, n=9), and integration of language courses into curriculum (24%, n=4). Furthermore, to complement the quantitative data, the qualitative analysis of the semi-interviews and reflective essays revealed parallel findings.

Responding to our attempt to find out the contribution of joining the teaching mobility program to the home institution, the ELT academics stated that their university and the ELT program were recognized by various institutions abroad. There was also interest in the academics' hometowns. Collaboration between the programs increased, which had a positive impact on the motivation for new academic studies. The following assertions were taken from two ELT academics:

[...] The program contributed to the international recognition of my institution and our ELT program. They were also curious about my hometown, too. (ELT academic, Interview data, 24 March 2015)

[...] Joining the program led to a great motivation for new academic studies and aroused a fresh interest in collaborative work. (ELT academic, Interview data, 24 March 2015)

Moreover, the reflective essay findings also revealed that being enrolled in such a program helped different institutions collaborate about new teaching styles, education systems, and learner needs. It was also beneficial in terms of adapting new teaching methods and techniques, as well as learning about European countries

[...] It has contributed to the cooperation of different institutions about new teaching styles, education systems and learner needs. (ELT academic, Reflective essay data, 14 April 2015)

[...] It was effective on developing new teaching methods and techniques, and on getting information about European countries. (ELT academic, Reflective essay data, 14 April 2015)

### **Problems Faced by the Turkish ELT Academics during the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility**

With regard to answering the fourth question about the problems faced by Turkish ELT academics about joining the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility, the data collected from the semi-structured interviews and reflective essays revealed that problems were mainly experienced before and during the mobility period. To put it simply, one of the ELT academics indicated that she experienced some financial, transportation, and clerical problems.

[...] In my own travel, apart from the financial problems I experienced due to the payment given a little bit late, I had only some trivial problems about transportation. For joining the program, the cleric work takes a long time. (ELT academic, Reflective essay data, 14 April 2015)

Besides, the participating academics complained about the heavy paper work for the application to the teaching abroad period.

[...] I had no major problem actually, but I should say that the whole process is full of paper work which can be a bit miserable from time to time. (ELT academic, Reflective essay data, 14 April 2015)

[...] This year I wanted to visit Poland as we have close connections but it required so much paper work that took much time to prepare. (ELT academic, Reflective essay data, 14 April 2015)

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perceptions of the Turkish ELT academics about ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility Program. More specifically, it attempts to find out their preferences for the participation in ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility, to examine the contribution of the enrollment in this program to their professional development and home institution, and finally, to learn about the problems faced during the participation in such mobility period(s).

The data gathered from the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews revealed that except for general interest in a visit to the host country, the Turkish ELT academics participated in the program for establishment of good personal relations with the staff of the host institution, general interest in visiting a host country, existence of cooperative relations beyond their program/faculty, and creating a link between the teaching periods abroad with research activities. Likewise, the participating academics engaged in this program for idea exchange and experiences with colleagues, the ability to monitor students' performance in English, the opportunity to learn about the motivation of learning English and how it reflects on the results of language teaching in a non-native country, the opportunity to collect data for research, a chance for cooperation in future research projects, an ability to enhance one's professional network, a place to discover different teaching strategies of the host institution in terms of ELT, an ability to compare and contrast education systems, and an opportunity to gain experience in teaching English in different contexts. These findings were similar to previous studies (Enders, 1998; Janson, Schomburg, & Teichler's, 2009; Topcu, 2011) which indicated that getting acquainted with different cultures, countries, institutions, and education systems; providing recognition of the home institution and Turkish culture; improving language skills and guidance for mobile students; strengthening the relationship with the hosting university; getting knowledge of the education system in a different country; and exchanging ideas and experiences with colleagues in the host country were among the major reasons for the joining the mobility program.

Furthermore, in order to find out whether or not the enrollment in such a program was effective on the Turkish ELT academics professional development, data were collected from questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and reflective essays. The findings revealed that all Turkish ELT academics agreed that the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility contributed to the enhancement of their international/intercultural understanding and designing study courses in different education programs. Moreover, improving their professional/career perspectives, broadening pedagogical knowledge, improving research contacts, developing new cooperation activities/joint projects, knowledge about variety education systems, learning new teaching methods, and knowledge about foreign language policy in a different country were among the other adding factors of the program for the Turkish ELT academics. These findings are parallel to the viewpoints of Richards and Farrell (2005) stating learning to teach is a lifelong period and the knowledge related to language teaching and learning is an experimental and incomplete state, and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers need regular chances to update their professional knowledge during their profession. Similarly, and closely related, Janson, Schomburg, and Teichler's (2009) study shows that even though teachers participating in ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility were already in advanced stages of their career in terms of having extensive international experience and well integrated international networks, the majority of the teachers shared a positive impact on their own professional development.

As for the question on whether or not the enrollment in such a program was effective on the Turkish ELT academics' home institution, the obtained data showed that the majority of the participants stated that ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility improved guidance available to mobile students, helped to develop new concepts and contents for study programs, provided knowledge on other countries such as Europe, etc., and provided addressing issues comparatively, coordination of programs between home programs and partner programs, knowledge on international relations or supranational organization, development of new teaching methods. These findings were in accordance with Janson, Schomburg, and Teichler's (2009) study focusing on the contribution of joining the program to the home institution with respect to guidance to mobile students, providing knowledge on other countries, coordination of study programs between the home institution and the host institution, the range of foreign

language teaching, development of new study concepts, and the increase of comparative approaches.

Finally, as for the potential problems experienced by the Turkish ELT academics about joining the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility, the findings showed that the participants shared some problems related to financial support, clerical work for participating the mobility, trivial problems, and full paper work in preparation for the teaching abroad period. These findings were similar to Kreitz and Teichler's (1997), Enders' (1998), Maiworm and Teichler's (2002), and Kasalak's (2013) research studies which found that the mobile teachers revealed similar problems during the application and teaching period of ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

The present study yields a number of descriptive and practical implications for the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility. First of all, the results provided insights into the perceptions of the Turkish ELT academics on the effects of the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility and helped to shed light on the Turkish ELT academics' preferences of participating ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility, and whether or not there are positive effects on the Turkish ELT academics' professional development and the home institution. The results also delineated whether or not there are the problems they faced during the teaching period and the application period. According to the findings gathered through the analysis of the questionnaires, the semi-structured interviews and reflective essays, the positive effect of the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility on the Turkish ELT academics' professional development and their home institution was clearly identified.

Specifically, the findings related to the contributions together with the problems of this particular program, can help and guide the integration process of Turkish higher education into the European system in terms of ELT departments in universities in Turkey and support the Turkish ELT academics in other universities to participate similarly. This can foster the current system in Turkey as a candidate country in the process of the full membership of European Union. Finally, the findings of this study can help to evaluate and revise the ERASMUS program in terms of efficiency and the need analysis for the program on a European scale.

### **Limitations and Future Scope**

The present study has some limitations for consideration. In our research, the population sample size was small. A total of seventeen participants, who answered the questionnaire, took part in the semi-structured interviews and wrote reflective essays, are not meant to be representative of a population, which might prevent the generalizability of the findings. This study, therefore, has several recommendations for further research. First of all, future researchers could replicate this study with a larger group of participants in different institutions. Additionally, there are different mobility programs (e.g., the Mevlana Exchange Program) for academics, which serve similar purposes; it is also likely that the perceptions of academics may vary. Therefore, it is recommended to replicate the present study by investigating other mobility programs and comparing the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility in order to present the differences and similarities across similar programs.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to find out the perceptions of the Turkish ELT academics about ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility Program. More specifically, the preferences of the participants for the participation in ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility, the contribution of the enrollment in this program to their professional development and home institution, and finally, the problems they faced during the mobility period(s). Our findings revealed that the mobility program had a positive contribution to their professional development, as well as their home institution, in various aspects. On the other hand, the participants experienced some problems related to financial issues, clerical issues, transportation and paperwork, which should be taken into consideration for the future applications to the program. In brief, the findings of this study clearly suggest that joining the ERASMUS Teaching Staff Mobility Program is positively perceived by the ELT academics, as it contributes both to their own progress in their teaching profession, as well as to the development of their host institution.

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