

PREPARATION FOR AN INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE PROGRAM: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF PROSPECTIVE ENGLISH
LANGUAGE TEACHERS' LIVED AND IMAGINED EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

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Since the Erasmus exchange program promises sociocultural experiences in different cross-cultural and educational contexts, it can contribute to the development of prospective English language teachers. However, participants' preparation experiences and thought patterns prior to the program may influence the quality and outcomes of the sociocultural experiences abroad. This study, therefore, aimed to explore preparation experiences of three Turkish prospective English language teachers who chose to study in England for a 4-month period. With a focus on future-oriented thought patterns and lived experiences throughout their preparation period, the study aimed to have an understanding of the period from the decision-making process to the final day at the home context. In order to reach the study aims, three semi-structured interviews over a six-month period were conducted with each participant. Participants were also asked to write their imagined one week experience in the target community, and their smart-phone messaging related to the preparation process was observed.

Each data analysis step involved analysis of each unique case. After all cases were completed and reported, convergences and divergences were sought for under superordinate themes. Lastly, interpretative/hermeneutic endeavors were deployed to bring a depth to the emerged themes. Through this interpretative phenomenological analysis, it was found that participants' experiences were shaped by *complex and dynamic decision-making process, a stressful formal preparation, a chaotic and undervalued informal preparation, emerging (inter)cultural dynamics involving target culture, and interrelated future-oriented dynamic thought patterns*. Following these themes, a need for preparing future study abroad participants for short-term international exchange programs emerged.

Keywords: Short-term international exchange programs, English language teacher education, intercultural competence, imagined communities, interpretative phenomenological analysis

ÖZ

ULUSLARARASI BİR DEĞİŞİM PROGRAMI İÇİN HAZIRLIK: İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRETMEN ADAYLARININ YAŞANMIŞ VE HAYAL EDİLMİŞ DENEYİMLERİNİN FENOMENOLOJİK BİR ANALİZİ

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Erasmus değişim programı farklı kültür ve eğitim ortamlarında sosyokültürel deneyimleri vaat ettiği için İngilizce öğretmen adaylarının gelişimine katkıda bulunabilir. Ancak, katılımcıların program öncesindeki hazırlık deneyimleri ve düşünce örüntüleri yurt dışındaki deneyimlerinin kalitesini ve sonuçlarını etkileyebilir. Bu çalışma, bu nedenle, 4 aylık bir dönem için İngiltere'de eğitim almayı seçen üç Türk İngilizce öğretmen adayının hazırlık deneyimlerini araştırmayı amaçlamıştır. Katılımcıların geleceğe yönelik düşünce örüntüleri ve hazırlık dönemi boyunca yaşamış oldukları deneyimler üzerine odaklanılarak karar verme süreci ve ülkeden ayrılma gününe kadar olan zaman dilimini anlamak amaçlanmıştır. Çalışma amaçlarına ulaşmak amacıyla altı aylık bir süre içinde her bir katılımcı ile üç yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme gerçekleştirilmiştir. Ayrıca, katılımcılardan hedef toplumda bir haftalık hayal edilmiş deneyimlerini yazmaları istenmiş ve hazırlık süreci ile ilgili akıllı telefon mesajlaşmaları izlenmiştir.

Her bir katılımcının sağladığı veriler ayrı bir vaka olarak ele alınmıştır. Bütün bu ayrı vakaların analizi tamamlandıktan ve rapor edildikten sonra, katılımcılar arasındaki

yakınlaşmalar ve farklılıklar üstanlamsal temalar altında aranmıştır. Son olarak, yorumbilgisel/yorumlayıcı çabalar ortaya konarak ortaya çıkmış temalara bir derinlik getirilmiştir. Böylesi bir yorumlayıcı fenomenolojik analiz süreci aracılığıyla katılımcıların deneyimlerinin *karmaşık ve dinamik bir karar verme süreci, stresli bir resmi hazırlık süreci, kaotik ve göz ardı edilmiş resmi olmayan bir hazırlık süreci, hedef kültürü içeren ve gelişen kültürlerarası dinamikler ve birbiriyle ilişkili gelecek odaklı dinamik düşünce örüntüleri* tarafından şekillendirildiği bulunmuştur. Bu ana temaları takiben, gelecekteki adayları kısa vadeli uluslararası değişim programları için hazırlama ihtiyacı ortaya çıkmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kısa vadeli uluslararası değişim programları, İngilizce öğretmen eğitimi, kültürlerarası yetkinlik, hayali topluluklar, yorumsal fenomenolojik analiz

To all people around the world who are positioned as *the other* and to those who can
see the world through the eyes of *the other*

and

To every member of my large family

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CGPA	Cumulative Grade Point Average
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DMIS	Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
ELF	English as a Lingua Franca
ELL	English Language Learner
EPEEP	English Proficiency Exam for Exchange Programs
ERASMUS	Expanded Regional Action Scheme for Mobility of University Students
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESN	Erasmus Student Network
EU	European Union
GET	Global Education Team at Keele University
ICC	Intercultural Communicative Competence
ICO	International Cooperations Office
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
IT	Information Technology
LPP	Legitimate Peripheral Participation
NNESTs	Non-native English-speaking Teachers
QDA	Qualitative Data Analysis
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
UK	United Kingdom

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Presentation

This chapter makes an introduction to this study. First, it introduces background of the study and conceptualizes the research aims and questions that are discussed in depth in next chapter. While presenting the background and conceptualization of the study, research purposes are briefly shared. At the end of the chapter, a number of key terms and concepts are also presented so as to prevent misunderstandings that may potentially emerge while reading the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

The world we inhabit today stresses the importance of multilingual and multicultural issues more than ever as a result of intense global dependencies. Graddol (2006) puts this interconnectivity as follows: "... we are now returning to the middle ages, to premodern times, as we see the erosion of national boundaries, greater multilingualism, and fluidity in identity." (p. 21). This erosion of the boundaries has accelerated economic interdependencies, migrations, border-crossings, flow of information and media increase under the broad name of globalization (Dolby & Rizvi, 2008; Kramsch, 2014). In a sense, we are all connected even when we deal with our local practices such as TV, media, and internet. In addition, crossing borders and experiencing a global culture are not extreme issues anymore (Arnett, 2002; Dolby & Rizvi, 2008). The English language is a key part of this global process. It helps globalization accelerate and globalization promotes the use of it; furthermore, it is listed as one of the basic skills in order to survive in today's economic systems (Graddol, 2006). Having the knowledge of English in today's world may also increase the chances of having international mobility opportunities. Therefore, English as the *lingua franca* of the global economy and as a medium of instruction in

most of the international universities gains more importance each day in this global interconnectivity (Rizvi, 2011).

Since countries are more dependent on each other today, intercultural understanding stands as a must for countries and people to establish a mutual understanding. In this sense, students in today's globalized world are required to have necessary skills such as a good command of English and intercultural competencies in order to work and live in multicultural and multilingual environments. Kramsch (2014) similarly underscores the necessity of raising individuals sensitive to diversity and different worldviews. These necessities have pushed universities, governments, and supranational unions to develop policies to improve students' intercultural and foreign language competencies in order to keep up with the pressure by global advancements. This process of internationalization also calls for further developments in technology, knowledge economy, and integrated world economy (Altbach & Knight, 2007). As a consequence, many higher education institutions put international orientation and mobility among their main aims in order to realize aims set by globalization and internationalization (Teichler & Janson, 2007). International education, similar to the position of English, is, therefore, highly valued in global market due to such advantages as gaining sophisticated linguistic and intercultural skills (Jacobone & Moro, 2014). Moreover, the Abraham Lincoln Study Act established by USA in 2006 and the Expanded Regional Action Scheme for Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS) program of Europe aim to equip students with international experiences which would hopefully help students to gain international, intercultural, and global competencies.

The ERASMUS (henceforth will be referred to as the Erasmus) program stands out in Europe with its relatively long history and high number of beneficiaries, which led it to be the largest international credit mobility scheme for universities in Europe (Souto-Otero, Huisman, Beerkens, De Wit, & Vujic, 2013). The program was established in 1987 to support and promote student mobility within Europe. Its main aims are to promote and sustain a knowledge-based economy, European integration, and shared European values; thus, a common European identity with economical

roots is targeted. After the establishment of the program, with the Bologna Declaration and the Bologna Process signed in 1999, European countries started to standardize their higher education to ease the mobility of students within Europe and to attract students from other countries (Teichler & Janson, 2007).

The European developments clearly offer opportunities for personal and professional development. English has also been a key part of this standardization as it has been used as medium of instruction in most of these participating universities (Graddol, 2006). More than 30 countries have participated in the program with more than 4.000 higher education institutions (Souto-Otero et al., 2013) since 1987. The program makes it possible for approximately 270,000 students each year to benefit from the Erasmus grant to live in another country and study at an international higher education institution (European Commission, 2015). However, these numbers and history of the program may not fully illustrate what exchange students experience during the process from the application until the return to home country. In this sense, Teichler (2004) offers a comprehensive summary of the process that Erasmus students go through.

According to Teichler (2004), students, first, focus on which field and at which institution to study, and they apply for the grant months before their departure. They usually tend to choose large and certain countries where they can speak English. Then, they are placed in their choices generally according to the some criteria such as language proficiency and academic achievement. In terms of the help they receive after being selected, Teichler (2004) admits that they are provided with some help, but the quality of help is not clear. Interestingly, almost half of the eligible candidates decide not to participate in the program. Teichler (2004) also claims that there is a need for preparation for host culture, language, and practical matters as a considerable number of previous exchange students reported that they had not been ready for the program. Thus, the success of the program is partly dependent on the quality of the preparation. Another interesting but understandable point is that students of foreign languages or language teacher candidates are frequently visible in

the Erasmus program partly because such international experiences are seen as a must for them and they have sufficient knowledge of foreign languages.

Upon their arrival, Erasmus exchange students are usually welcomed and assisted well. However, they may face some major problems like administrative matters, accommodation and financial problems, so the grant provided usually does not cover all the expenses (Vossensteyn et al., 2010). Students generally sign a learning agreement so that the courses they take at their host university can be recognized by their home university, which became an easier process after the Bologna Declaration. They also engage in academic, cultural, linguistic, and extracurricular activities during their stay. However, Teichler (2004) warns authorities in that students may not get integrated into all activities, so there is always a danger of not engaging in activities or practices in the host culture. He also shows that uninvolved students mostly interact with students or people from their own country of origin. As a result, he strongly advises an immersion and draws attention to the contrasts between host and home cultures so that sojourners can work on them and maximize the benefits of the Erasmus program.

However, the story depicted by Teichler (2004) may show variance among sojourners from different country contexts. Furthermore, lived experiences during preparation period and thought patterns prior to the exchange may pose significant importance in terms of the quality of an exchange period. This study, therefore, gives an ear to the voices of prospective English language teachers from Turkey who look forward to their Erasmus exchange period. This in-depth inquiry also aims to help Erasmus exchange candidates visualize their possibly life-changing experience beforehand, and maximize and optimize the benefits of the international experience.

In a broader sense, this study aims to explore the lived and imagined experiences of Turkish pre-service English language teachers in order to offer a comprehensive picture to the authorities, university exchange coordinators, future exchange students, and to the involved institutions both in Turkish and European contexts. Through concentrating on their preparation period, it is possible to understand the complex experiences that motivated participants to make their decision and to predict the

quality of their future experience in the host culture and community. These aims are important to be realized because the literature, which is going to be discussed in detail in Chapter 2, shows that thought patterns (i.e., beliefs, motivations, expectations, and concerns), intercultural understandings, identity, and personal histories prior to sojourn have a remarkable effect on the quality of the exchange period and on the gains of study abroad programs (Byram & Feng, 2006; Dekaney, 2008; Goldoni, 2013; Teichler, 2004). In fact, the gains do not appear merely after an international exchange program but they are shaped by the participants' lifeworld or personal histories prior to and during such situated experiences (Jackson, 2008, 2010). The characteristics of human experiences indeed consist of interrelated entities that are shaped around personal histories and certain contexts (Karaman, 2010); therefore, study abroad could be far more complex and bear varying individual outcomes and adaptation processes among sojourners depending on thought patterns, personal history, preparation prior to the experience, and cultural similarities or differences (Allen & Dupuy, 2012; Brown & Holloway, 2008; Llanes, Tragant, & Serrano, 2012; Stronkhorst, 2005).

Exploring the issues around the active participation in the target culture is of tremendous importance since study abroad programs promise a variety of benefits such as intercultural and linguistic competencies (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubbard, 2006; Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Jacobone & Moro, 2014) and immersion or active participation is the key facilitator to gain what study abroad programs offer (Jackson, 2010; Kalocsai, 2009; Kaypak & Ortactepe, 2014; Kinginger, 2013). Such gains from participation in intercultural contexts abroad are highly valued in terms of improving language skills, understanding *the other* and of developing an ethnorelative view of cultures (Bennett, 1993). Therefore, through focusing on the thought patterns, the challenges that the exchange candidates may face in terms of adaptation and integration could be revealed and some necessary precautions could be listed in order to help future candidates to maximize and optimize their intercultural experiences.

1.2 Conceptualization of the Study

Today's educational systems are expected to foster empathy, tolerance, and respect among students so that they can develop a global understanding and have a chance to work or live in multilingual or multicultural environments (Dooly & Villanueva, 2006; Tochon, 2009). Since both pre- and in-service teachers are key actors of an education system, this notion of developing a global and intercultural understanding stands out for teacher candidates, too. Dooly (2010), in a similar manner, puts forward that teachers should be ready to teach in multicultural classrooms where diversity is embraced. To support this idea, Cushner and Mahon (2002) believe having intercultural competence and awareness would produce individuals who can keep up with the developments by the global world. Therefore, working with diverse population of students, developing global perspectives and social justice remain as key issues in teacher education as long as institutions all around the world strive to accomplish aims for global education which necessitates cross-cultural knowledge, intercultural competence, and a membership in global professional communities (Phillion, Malewski, Sharma, & Wang, 2009; Willard-Holt, 2001).

The expectations from pre- and in-service teachers are clear in terms of intercultural and global issues from the theoretical window. However, research shows that theory is not enough in teacher education, there must also be practical experience and reflection through an experiential learning process within international contexts in order to have globally competent teachers who are responsive to culture and diversity (Burns & Richards, 2009; Dooly & Villanueva, 2006; Goodwin, 2010; Zhao, 2010). In order to translate theoretical knowledge to practice, context and experience are extremely important to teacher learning or more specifically to language teacher learning (Burns & Richards, 2009; Cushner, 2007; Putnam & Borko, 2000; Wright, 2010). Since learning is situated in different social contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991), different contexts yield different kinds of learning. In this direction, Mahan and Stachowski (1990) highlight the importance of extending learning beyond one learning domain in order to situate the learning in specific contexts. In line with these ideas and according to this sociocultural approach for teacher learning, learning can

be seen as a social process in different communities of practice where knowledge is co-constructed through social participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1999).

The underpinnings of sociocultural theory and communities of practice are highly applicable to the study abroad contexts where students participate in different communities and take part in different learning domains. Participation in communities of practice in settings abroad is indeed highly appropriate for teacher candidates to gain a deeper understanding of the culture and language that are different from theirs. Providing international experiences in study abroad settings is, therefore, highly recommended to teacher education institutions or departments (Cushner & Mahon, 2002) because there is a constant complaint that teacher education programs lag behind the demands brought by globalization and internationalization (Kissock & Richardson, 2010). These programs are also quite attractive for pre-service teachers since study abroad programs generally include a student teaching component in themselves, too (Willard-Holt, 2001). Thus, the international programs have a crucial potential in offering both intercultural and teaching competencies. In a way, the gap between theory and practice is made closer in an international learning context which enriches teaching practice and satisfies global demands.

The international field experiences indeed are highly desirable for pre-service language teachers to have an access to different lifeworlds and promote deep reflections (Karaman, 2010). They attract attention from professionals since there is a constant complaint about lack of practice or experiential learning in second language teacher education programs, and it is argued that teacher training programs across the globe fail to prepare language teacher candidates for different contexts. (Burns & Richards, 2009; Freeman, 2009; Karaman, 2014). As international experiences help teacher candidates to gain a sociocultural participation in different cultures and contexts, they are not only an academic endeavor but they also present formal and informal learning opportunities in and out of the university environment. Based on this idea, it is plausible to assert that study abroad programs including international student teaching enable language teacher candidates to gain valuable experiences

toward being a globally-minded and interculturally experienced language teacher. This issue is actually gaining more importance in Turkey because the recent immigration policies have opened Turkey's gates to refugees and to many other international students, so in the near future, Turkey may need teachers who are responsive to diversity and different cultures. Study abroad practices could, in a similar sense, be helpful to raise such culturally sensitive teachers for Turkish education system.

Graves (2009) gives intercultural competence as part of the system of knowledge bases of language teaching, which can be acquired in international contexts to an important and sufficient degree. Therefore, international exchange programs like the Erasmus may enhance knowledge base and practical repertoire of language teacher candidates. International experiences may also help pre-service language teachers to improve their language skills and their professionalism, thereby helping them to construct their nonnative teacher identity as a result of being exposed to different varieties of English in an international context (Kamhi-Stein, 2009). Through experiencing a foreign culture with a foreign language, it is also possible for them to grasp all the complexities of language learning including cognitive and affective changes (Lee, 2009). As a result, they may feel more confident toward their language use and may look for potential paths for their professional development on the global arena.

So far international experiences have been shown to be valuable for English language teacher candidates in many ways. However, in order to have an access to all these resources offered by study abroad programs, international students are expected to put an effort in participation in different communities of practice abroad instead of spending time with their peers from the same country (Amuzie & Winke, 2009; Barkhuizen & Feryok, 2006; Jackson, 2010; Karaman & Tochon, 2007, 2010). Thus, to position themselves in those communities, it is argued that they, first, need to understand their own histories and mindset, and they would then be able to take necessary steps toward their active participation (Graves, 2009; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001). Lave and Wenger (1991) also stress that situated learning harmonizes mental

processes with the social nature of learning, so exploring the mindset or cognition of teacher candidates to predict their participation and direct them in a better way is quite important. Kinginger (2004) similarly argues that an individual's social, linguistic, gender and class background determine the quality of the study abroad experience. Thus, one of the important aims of this study is to explore lived and imagined experiences, and thought patterns of study abroad candidates, who are pre-service English language teachers, so that people who are interested in this area can understand their histories and predict potential challenges in settings abroad and can take necessary actions.

On the other hand, to investigate and illustrate the imagined experiences of study abroad candidates in host communities of practice, the concept of *imagined communities*, which was first proposed by Anderson (1983), shows promise and potential. According to him, members of a nation do not know each other but they have a clear image of their fellow citizens through imagination although they have never met and had no interaction. Norton (2000, 2001) introduced this concept to Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) field. She puts forward that language learners have imagined communities in their minds due to their connection to the world of the language that they learn. These imagined communities are not independent from reality; rather, they are strongly tied to the individuals' past and present experiences, and most importantly influence and shape their future actions (Chang, 2011). Moreover, these imagined communities have significant effects on people's current actions and investments (Kanno & Norton, 2003). Thus, these imagined communities are not fantasy worlds; on the contrary, there must be some dynamic factors creating imagined communities in individuals' minds. Imagined communities are helpful in understanding dreams of people at specific times in the future since an imagined community also projects an imagined identity which opens ways for motivation and acquisition for a language (Kanno, 2003). Moreover, this type of imagination plays a role in how individuals shape their relationships to particular communities and how they position themselves at these

communities; then they consider how they can invest in particular resources to gain access to these communities (Dagenais, 2003).

The concept of imagined communities has also strong connections to the Wenger's (1999) concept of *communities of practice*. These communities are simply the ones where certain groups of people gather, share and practice, so it tries to explain the nature of mind and social world interconnection. When Wenger first coined this term, it was understood as immediately accessible communities; however, Kanno and Norton (2003) claimed imagined communities also function in the same way. Interestingly, Wenger himself also included imagination in the process of identity construction related to the communities of practice. He suggests three types of belonging: engagement, alignment, and imagination. According to him, people negotiate their identities through both real and imagined participation in communities of practice and this participation requires individual agency, which results in a socially constructed identity. Imagination is a key part of this negotiation process. Wenger explains it with the example of apple seed and apple tree. He says imagination is like looking at an apple seed and seeing how it turns into an apple tree. In a sense, this type of imagination is important to create new communities of practice in mind and act accordingly. Therefore, both Kanno and Norton (2003) and Wenger (1999) believe people imagine the communities that they want to be a part of someday although they have not met other members, and they look for ways to get an acceptance to those imagined communities. This acting involves some investment in future communities of practice or in imagined communities.

Bourdieu (1991) makes it necessary for someone to possess *symbolic, cultural, and linguistic capital* to have an access to the communities that the individual seeks for an acceptance. Investment is the key part of this seeking acceptance process. This also has a direct implication for imagined communities. An individual naturally invests in the imagined communities in their mind and acquire the required *capital*; otherwise, s/he becomes an impostor (Bourdieu, 1991). Language learners could be an example of this capital acquiring, investment, and seeking for membership process (Norton Peirce, 1995). They sometimes imagine themselves as a part of the

community where the language they learn is spoken and they invest in resources which would make them a part of this community. They may watch movies or listen to the music in the target language so that they can both improve their language skills and feel as a part of that community through the possible lives they watch or listen to.

Ryan (2006) contends that gaining a full participation in the imagined communities by successful interaction and performance is possible, so active participation is necessitated for a full membership in an imagined community. However, there is also a risk of being rejected by those imagined communities because they, in a sense, contain some degree of idealization on the side of individuals. Therefore, it is possible to have a feeling of disappointment when our identity and lived experiences conflict with the characteristics of the imagined communities and of the members who make the community (Carroll, Motha, & Price, 2008). Therefore, understanding lived experiences of people before an international experience is of utmost importance (Barkhuizen & de Clerk, 2006) in order to help them find reasonable and realistic ways to integrate into their imagined communities; otherwise, obstacles may result in resistance and stopping investment (Norton, 2000). Pittaway (2004), in that sense, admits that it is not possible for everyone to turn their dreams into real.

Since it is possible to help learners feel on the way and invest more wisely, language learners could be provided with help to create imagined communities and show agency in seeking membership in those communities, in the end, a variety of gains is promised (Kinging, 2004; Song, 2012). However, one caution should be considered: these language learners do not have to be a true member of a nation that speaks English and they cannot be forced to be, but they need to place their hybrid or multilingual identities as a member of multilingual or diverse world, so a belonging to a world beyond their national borders may enable them to invest in language learning and keep their imagination alive without any limits (Pavlenko & Norton, 2007). Otherwise they would be forced to be a part of a linguistic imperialism which may serve the needs of organizations that benefit from the dominance of English

(Phillipson, 2008), so they need to create imagined communities that serve their needs best and increase their motivation to live in a diverse world.

Overall the imagined communities concept could be a valid and indirect way of exploring goals, motivations, and investments. Carroll et al. (2008) value the role of the imagined communities in exploring unspoken goals so they suggest that researchers can use these to enter into individuals' minds. In the case of study abroad programs, it is possible to illustrate a complex picture of international exchange students' preconceptions, imaginations, and investments that are shaped around their preparations prior to the sojourn, so it is important to understand how their imagination of target society and communities of practice influences their preparation period. By both examining the lived and imagined experiences of study abroad candidates, it is quite possible to give a comprehensive picture of outgoing Turkish pre-service English language teachers, to discuss their future participation in *imagined communities of practice* in settings abroad, and to predict the challenges and the ways of seeking membership in the target community. Of course there could be individual differences among them as imagination is highly individual experience, but the aim is to look for major patterns among them. As an indirect result of this inquiry, it is possible to both help those participants and the future candidates of the Erasmus exchange program from both Turkey and other European contexts.

1.3 Definitions of Key Terms and Concepts

In order to avoid ambiguities and misunderstandings that may potentially arise while reading the rest of this study, it is crucial first to define the key terms and concepts and, if necessary, to discuss the approach of this study to these key terms and concepts since there may sometimes be disagreement in literature on some terms and concepts. Below the definitions are provided:

Communities of practice and imagined communities: According to the sociocultural framework developed by Wenger (1999) that is called *communities of practice*, it is claimed that human learning takes place in different tangible communities of practice such as workplace, institutions, or families. A community of

practice is, in this sense, “a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98). Communities function with participants who differently engage in the practices of their communities, and through such a practice, learning occurs. Wenger (1999) argue that newcomers move toward fuller participation in a community of practice with the help of social activities and relations with old-timers in that particular community. This process is known as *legitimate peripheral participation* (LPP). Peripherality, in that regard, means “an opening, a way of gaining access to sources for understanding through growing involvement” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 37). Therefore, the theory underscores the critical role of competence and membership in a particular community on the human learning.

On the other hand, *imagination* also enables people to engage in communities that are beyond their immediate access (Kanno & Norton, 2003). In that regard, “[it] is a distinct form of belonging to a particular community of practice and a way in which individuals locate themselves and others in the world” (Pavlenko, 2003, p. 253). According to Anderson (1983), it is this power of imagination that keeps nations together through print-capitalism and language. Norton and Kamal (2003), however, problematize Benedict Anderson’s framework by stating that people have developed multiple imagined communities and hybrid identities resulting from immigration and communication technologies. It is, therefore, possible for language learners to imagine communities beyond their physical access and envision imagined identities in those imagined communities that do not have to be as tangible as actual communities of practice. In this study, the terms *imagined communities* and *communities of practice* are combined as *imagined communities of practice* since the participants in this study are assumed to have imagined communities of practice in their mind in which they would position their identity, participation type, and investment plans before living in England.

Ethnocentrism vs. ethnorelativism: According to the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), people go through certain stages while developing

their intercultural sensitivity or competence (Bennett & Bennett, 2004). The first DMIS stages are given as *ethnocentric* which means that a person places his/her own culture at a central position to perceive and interpret the reality. The second DMIS stages are known as *ethnorelative* which enables the interculturally competent person to experience his/her own culture in the context of other cultures:

In general, the ethnocentric stages can be seen as ways of *avoiding cultural difference*, either by denying its existence, by raising defenses against it, or by minimizing its importance. The ethnorelative stages are ways of *seeking cultural difference*, either by accepting its importance, by adapting a perspective to take it into account, or by integrating the whole concept into a definition of identity. (Bennett & Bennett, 2004, p. 153).

Globalization and internationalization: Internationalization is sometimes used interchangeably with globalization. However, Altbach and Knight (2007) makes a distinction between globalization and internalization as follows:

Globalization and internalization are related but not the same thing. Globalization is the context of economic and academic trends that are part of the reality of the 21st century. Internalization includes the policies and practices undertaken by academic systems and institutions-and even individuals- to cope with the global academic environment. (p. 290).

A valid definition of internationalization has been given as “[i]nternationalization at the national, sector, and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education.” (Knight, 2003, p. 2). As a result of internationalization efforts, some initiatives such as branch campuses, programs for international students, establishing English-medium programs have been launched worldwide whereas:

The results of globalization include the integration of research, the use of English as the lingua franca for scientific communication, the growing international labor market for scholars and scientists, the growth of communications firms and of multinational and technology publishing, and the use of information technology (IT) (Altbach & Knight, 2007, p. 291).

This study, overall, recognizes the distinction between globalization and internationalization that is offered by Altbach and Knight (2007).

Host university and home university: In this study, host university refers to Keele University in England since participants are selected and prepared for that particular university for their Erasmus exchange period. On the other hand, home university refers to the Turkish context where participants are 3rd year undergraduate students who study English language teaching.

Identity and investment: The communities of practice notion supposes that when language learners involve in language practices, they are not only conversing with their interlocutors but they are also constructing their identities. Thus, language learning is shaped around mutual engagement which necessitates involvements from both language learner and learning context; therefore, Norton (2001) defines identity as “how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future” (p. 5). Furthermore, Norton (2000, 2001) claims that languages learners invest in a language so that they could have an access to symbolic (e.g., friendship, education) and material resources (e.g., money and goods), which also resonates in social identity which is fluid and changing across time and space. Overall, this study assumes that the participants have constructed their identities through investing in actual and imagined communities of practice. However, it is also presupposed that their language learning and teaching identities are still evolving with respect to their actual and imagined communities of practice. These sociocultural concepts (i.e., imagined communities, communities of practice, identity, and investment) are explained in pages 9, 10, 11, 12, 33, 34, 35, 36 in detail.

Intercultural (communicative) competence: Although no agreement has been reached on the definition of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006) and it is sometimes presented with or without the term *communicative*, in broad terms, “intercultural competence is the ability to communicate effectively in cross-cultural situations and to relate appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts.” (Bennett & Bennett, 2004, p. 149). Byram (1997)’s model for intercultural communicative competence (ICC) enjoys a widespread recognition in the literature (Deardorff, 2006); that’s why, this study subtly relies on that model while discussing goals for

the development of an intact ICC. Byram's (1997) ICC model, in that sense, includes attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical awareness. Within this model, the ultimate goal is to extend intercultural fact exchanges into an intercultural mindset that views cultures from a relativist perspective. The model, therefore, highlights open-mindedness, reflectivity on cultural similarities and differences, reduce in ethnocentrism.

Interculturally/globally competent teacher, global teacherhood, and culturally responsive teacher: Teachers nowadays need to understand the global economic interconnectivity and interdependence of peoples, to care about people living all around the world, to grasp global nature of societal dynamics, to respect and protect human and cultural diversity, to support social justice, and to sustain planet earth; this set of skills and knowledge that is combined with the intercultural issues in teacher education field is called *intercultural/global competence* (Sercu, 2006; Zhao, 2010) or *global teacherhood* (Karaman & Tochon, 2007) or *culturally responsive teaching* (Gay, 2010). All these labels are used interchangeably in this study. Teachers with such a competence would value diversity in their classrooms and create democratic learning environments. *Diversity* is also defined as:

...cultural differences in values, beliefs, and behaviors learned and shared by groups of interacting people defined by nationality, ethnicity, gender, age, physical characteristics, sexual orientation, economic status, education, profession, religion, organizational affiliation, and any other grouping that generates identifiable patterns. (Bennett & Bennett, 2004).

Study abroad and international exchange programs: These programs are broadly understood as educational programs that take place outside the home country. They could be credit or degree mobility programs. The Erasmus exchange framework is the main focus in this study since the participants benefit from this program. Therefore, the terms *study abroad* and *international exchange program* refer to the Erasmus program while presenting and discussing findings. The Erasmus program is a short-term credit mobility program offering its beneficiaries a semester or a full academic year in a European country. The international exchange period that is spent in the host context is called *sojourn* or *international exchange period* in this study.

Participants of the present study, who are prospective English language teachers, are also interchangeably referred to as *international exchange student candidate*, *pre-sojourner*, and *study abroad candidate*.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Presentation

The focus of this study is on the preparation experiences and thought patterns of Erasmus exchange candidates who are prospective English language teachers from Turkey; therefore, this literature review is positioned mostly on the student mobility in Europe and on prospective English or language teachers in study abroad contexts. The broader framework is the position of study abroad programs in teacher education literature, which includes international student teaching and international field experiences. Overall the major focus is on the Erasmus program and the experiences of prospective English language teachers from both international and Turkish contexts in respect to international programs. Besides, benefits of study abroad programs and the investigation of imagined communities concept with language learners or teachers are discussed in this chapter. Following this comprehensive review of literature, need for this study and purpose statement and research questions are presented in this chapter.

2.1 Globalization, Study Abroad, and the Erasmus Exchange Program

Globalization has created a world where transnational interconnectivity is prominent. Particular localities are highlighted in this interconnectivity, but it is also known that the local practices are integrated into broader systems of global connections (Rizvi, 2011). In such a global context, international education or study abroad programs are highly valued by countries in order to increase the mobility of students and increase global activities (Graddol, 2006). It is not only valued by authorities, but also valued by students or graduates of study abroad programs who view it as one of the most important experiences that one should have during undergraduate studies (Paige, Fry, Stallman, Josic, & Jon, 2009). This compounded value finds a remarkable place in educational systems because educators and students are also expected to have an

understanding of globalization, systems in other countries, and interdependence, all of which seem to be achievable through study abroad programs (Zhao, 2010).

The Erasmus exchange program is the representation of European efforts to increase the youth mobility and interconnectivity among European countries. Its main aims are to increase cooperation between European higher education institutions and mobility of European university students. By promoting the participation and increasing the number of participants, it is also aimed to raise globally and interculturally competent students and teachers (Souto-Otero et al., 2013). Following these aims and practices of the program, a sufficient number of studies approached it from different angles.

Vossensteyn et al. (2010) conducted a large scale study with almost 20.000 responses from both Erasmus and non-Erasmus students with a focus on improving participation in the Erasmus program. Although participants thought the program would enable them to improve their language and cultural skills, they gave financial constraints as the most important barrier. Second, they gave credit recognition as a barrier or constraint due to the risk of prolonging graduation time. Third, concerns related to limited language skills, family reasons, and administrative burden were thought to be other major barriers or constraints. Therefore, they suggested increasing grant amount, clear and systematic accreditation of courses, and effective preparation in order to increase both quality and participation rate of the Erasmus program. However, their results do not speak for all the European contexts including Turkey.

Jacobone and Moro (2014), in their evaluation paper of the Erasmus program, showed that Erasmus students acquire more human capital than students who stay at their home university, and these students are valued more in the labor market. This market value of the Erasmus experience is stressed in another study conducted by Botas and Huisman (2013). In their study, participants gave priority to the employability aspects of the program rather than to living in a different culture or learning a new language. These motivations indeed changed among participants but

still participants were not possibly aware of high gains resulting from a study abroad experience.

In addition to its perceived added value to curriculum vitae (CV), a study abroad program is viewed as highly valuable for pre-service teachers because it provides them with valuable experiences in intercultural and diverse environments, which help educators raise teachers with a global consciousness and a multicultural perspective (Phillion et al., 2009). Moreover, study abroad programs designed for pre-service teachers generally include a student teaching component; in this sense, Willard-Holt (2001) showed that American pre-service teachers found even a six day trip to Mexico beneficial and they reported significant personal and professional changes. They also reported how the experience made them challenge their preconceptions and helped them develop important teaching skills after being a foreigner or minority in a foreign culture. The benefits or gains of study abroad programs are to be discussed in detail in the upcoming sections. Before discussing gains of study abroad programs from different perspectives, it would be helpful to position pre-service English or language teachers in the literature in terms of study abroad and international exchange programs.

2.2 Study Abroad and Pre- and In-service Language or English Language Teachers

The need for globally competent teachers who value different cultures and diversity has been stressed lately since some scholars complain the lack of internationalization efforts in most of the teacher education programs and regard study abroad as a good opportunity to raise globally and culturally sensitive teachers (Kissock & Richardson, 2010; Malewski & Phillion, 2009). Language teacher education also views intercultural contact as an added goal, and expects language teachers to be proficient in the culture and language that they are going to teach once they graduate (Velez-Rendon, 2002), so study abroad programs may provide participants with sociocultural experiences which may enhance their language learning and teaching practices. Thanks to their potential benefits, these international programs are on the

rise and have started to gain an important position in language teacher education (Barkhuizen & Feryok, 2006).

In the studies conducted by Barkhuizen and Feryok (2006), and Lee (2009, 2011), pre-service language teachers from Hong Kong reported important gains after their immersion experience. They claimed that prospective teachers acquired new teaching ideas and skills, increased their intercultural awareness, developed their language skills with heightened language awareness, critically compared educational systems, and realized their weaknesses in language learning and teaching. However, there were also some complaints about not having a chance to communicate with local people and staying closer to the peers from their home university. This type of national attachment is not a rare occasion among international students. In Karaman and Tochon's (2010) study, a prospective language teacher in an international student teaching context complained how regular interactions with other sojourners hindered the opportunities to interact with local culture and people, so the peer circle acted as an important factor in letting participants have an access to different worldviews. Therefore, they strongly suggested that study abroad students should maximize their interactions with local people who may challenge their existing worldviews.

In another study by the same authors, a participant frequently complained about the lack of opportunities to interact with local people due to the fact that she spent more time with her peers (Karaman & Tochon, 2007). However, she appreciated the value of different and challenging viewpoints, and this fostered her skills toward *global teacherhood*. On the other hand, another participant from the same study could not turn such transformative opportunities into advantages and resisted to developing new ways of understandings. This finding also showed that study abroad experiences might differ among participants and each required a close examination. Tanaka (2007) and Amuzie and Winke (2009) also complained about the lack of opportunities to communicate with native speakers of English during study abroad periods. Study abroad participants, therefore, may maintain personal contact mostly with other exchange students and limit their interaction with the host country

students or locals, and even the worse, they may spend most of their time with co-nationals (Sigalas, 2010); hence, being in an international context does not guarantee linguistic and intercultural gains if in- or pre-service language teachers do not take any deliberate action toward them.

Yang (2011), on the other hand, shared a number of benefits for pre-service English language teachers who studied in Canada. The participants reported an overall happiness with the program and shared their satisfaction with the chances of comparing cultures, education systems, school cultures, and learning styles. They also learned to cater to diversity through the appreciation of different cultures and practices. The similar gains were also mentioned by the pre-service teachers in the studies conducted by Brindley, Quinn, and Morton (2009), Lee (2009), Mahan and Stachowski (1990), and Pence and Macgillivray, (2008) who showed that pre-service teachers started to think critically and opened new and broader perspectives into teaching practices through constant reflection, so the international experiences worked as a catalyst for their professional development.

As for the other gains of study abroad programs for language teachers or teacher candidates, English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers from Hong Kong in the study conducted by Trent (2011) thought the study abroad experience in Australia contributed to their professional teacher identity although they had some tensions of *boundary encounters*; as a result, he warned researchers in taking into account the complexities of identity construction before, during, and after study abroad experiences. Another study by Allen (2010) showed that French teachers from US, who spent three weeks in France, felt they developed more empathy for language learners and they made their lessons more authentic after their visit. They also reported that the visit helped participants consider professional development opportunities and renew their passion in language teaching and learning besides developing an intercultural understanding. Therefore, it is strongly recommended for all language teachers to live and study in foreign environments (Cushner & Mahon, 2002; Cushner & Brennan, 2007).

The participants in Yang's (2011) study, however, noted that their experience would have been a lot more productive if they had been trained prior to the experience. The same concern was shared by Barkhuizen and Feryok (2006), too. Coleman (1998) similarly warned authorities in that exchange students might have stereotypes about the host culture in their minds prior to their departure and they might reinforce these stereotypes during their stay by selecting the stimuli which would reinforce their stereotypes. It was, therefore, suggested to explore preconceptions of participants before they leave the home country. Jackson (2010) supported this investigation of preconceptions by showing how identity construction of language teachers in the home context influenced their participation in local culture.

On the other hand, it is known that Erasmus exchange students have abundant opportunities to develop an awareness toward the position of English as a *lingua franca* (ELF) (Kalocsai, 2009). It is important for nonnative language teachers to develop ELF awareness so that they can position their nonnative English language teacher identity and feel confident in their language skills. Kaypak and Ortactepe (2014), in this sense, reported high linguistic gains for Turkish language learners in an ELF community where they realized it was not too necessary to speak with a perfect grammar and they developed a heightened familiarity with different varieties of English language in a similar vein to the participants in the study conducted by Lee (2009). Thus, it can well be said that international experiences could be helpful for pre- and in-service English language teachers and for English language learners in practicing and improving their language skills as well as developing a comprehensive understanding toward ELF; however, the active participation and interaction is again key to these improvements (Brown & Holloway, 2008; Jackson, 2008).

Overall teacher education urged authorities to include a global perspective or an international experience in order to ensure that teachers are equipped with necessary skills to promote global awareness in their students (Sahin, 2008). This need is even doubled for language teacher candidates because they are expected to experience a foreign culture in which a foreign language is spoken so that they can experience

complex cognitive and affective changes around language learning and teaching (Lee, 2009). However, studies have shown that active participation in the target culture is required to maximize the benefits of a study abroad program. Thus, pre-service English language teachers are expected to take agency and explore culture and language through taking an active participation so that they can gain necessary intercultural and linguistic gains.

2.3 Expectations, Motivations, Concerns, and Decision-making Processes of International Students

The literature shows that there are many different voices in terms of expectations and motivations of study abroad students prior to their experience. It is crucial to learn these factors because it is known that study abroad students tend to create the ways through which they create meaning abroad before their departure for host country (Jewett, 2010). It is also a common warning in the literature that students' attitudes and expectations prior to the program may significantly influence the outcomes (Coleman, 1998; Dekaney, 2008, Jacobone & Moro, 2014; Teichler, 2004). Moreover, students' intentions and expectations may help study abroad programs take necessary steps and adjust their programs according to these students' voices.

Although they show variance among students from different country and educational contexts, the expectations of study abroad students can be given simply as improving foreign language skills, experiencing a different culture and broadening worldviews, increasing chances for future graduate studies, spending some leisure time, and making CVs more competitive in the job market (Gonzalez, Mesanza, & Mariel, 2011; Lesjak, Juvan, Ineson, Yap, & Axelsson, 2015; Liu & Cai, 2013; Van Mol & Timmerman, 2014). These expectations usually reflect the dominance of personal and social developmental goals for participation in the Erasmus program (Juvan & Lesjak, 2011; Van Mol & Timmerman, 2014). One important point, however, is the lack of goal specificity; most participants usually fail to elaborate on their goals and how they are going to achieve them, so it is recommended to supervisors to help the candidates with their goals and plans (Allen, 2010). Moreover, participants with realistic expectations may cope well with adaptation problems and be more active

and motivated (Jackson, 2008); otherwise, with unrealistic expectations, they may have a negative reaction to the new environment and become disappointed (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001).

While choosing their host destination, these international students, especially Erasmus exchange students, generally give main reasons for participating as lower cost of living, attractive climate, touristic attractions, and good position for travelling in Europe (Gonzalez et al., 2011; Lesjak et al., 2015; Stronkhorst, 2005) rather than focusing on reputation of the participating universities. Forsey, Broomhall, and Davis (2011) add to these points by stating that a certain number of the participants gave their priorities as having fun, travelling, and making new friends. In the case of the Erasmus program, participants in the study conducted by Jacobone and Moro (2014) appreciated the academic, intercultural, and professional motives but placed more importance on cultural and leisure activities. However, the emphasis on the *fun* part of the Erasmus should not be misinterpreted because students may still benefit from spending a considerable time in an international context and may develop an international mindset (Juvan & Lesjak, 2011; Lesjak et al., 2015).

During the decision-making process, they generally seek the advice of other exchange students, their peers, and family members both through face-to-face conversations and internet searches (Gonzalez et al., 2011; Maria Cubillo, Sanchez, & Cervino, 2006; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Maria Cubillo et al. (2006) put forward that the students tend to take academic reputation and attractiveness of the campus into account while decision-making; however, they added that students generally, first, chose the country and then decided on the institution. On the other hand, the influence of media and news services should not be underestimated for the decision made for a host destination (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). Based on all these different factors, decision-making for studying abroad is a result of the complex interplay of several dynamics often involving both a subconscious and conscious process (Maringe & Carter, 2007). These dynamics may also change for different sociocultural contexts.

Some other researchers took some initiatives to investigate predictors of study abroad. Souto-Otero et al. (2013) found context and personal experiences as important factors or determinants of study abroad intentions. Similarly, Salisbury, Umbach, Paulsen, and Pascarella (2009) showed students' socioeconomic status and the social and cultural capital accumulated before and during freshman year were strong predictors of study abroad participation. Furthermore, Goldstein and Kim (2006) gave some possible predictors of study abroad as completing a degree, positive expectations about the experience, higher levels of ethnorelativism, and interest in learning a language. Parents also have a subtle impact on mobility decisions both in positive and negative ways (Van Mol & Timmerman, 2014). Other negative issues in determining the participation are the negative experiences of the previous students, finance, fear to prolong graduation, leaving close people behind; therefore, the reasons to stay are shaped around finance, social attachments or networks, and academic issues (Van Mol & Timmerman, 2014). However, these determinants are not explored in all national contexts across Europe including Turkey.

On the other hand, intercultural sojourners have their own concerns and predicted challenges and it is indeed natural to be concerned with the upcoming experience due to the psychological distress caused by border crossings (Ward et al., 2001). These main concerns can be listed as cost of the program, language barriers, integrating into local life, being discriminated against, culture shock, homesickness, accommodation, credit transfer, and paperwork (Dessoff, 2006; Goldstein & Kim, 2006; Liu & Cai, 2013; Souto-Otero et al., 2013). Language learning is actually one of the biggest challenges foreseen by study abroad candidates. Phillion et al. (2009) regarded the language as the most important barrier to international exchange opportunities, and students indeed regard the language as an important factor before decision to participate in the Erasmus program (Lesjak et al., 2015). This could be the reason behind the point made by Souto-Otero et al. (2013) who alerted authorities for increasing language learning opportunities for exchange students. So far, the literature has demonstrated that different contexts and different individuals create

different expectations and challenges or concerns for themselves regarding the international experiences. Therefore, conducting further studies in different cultural and national contexts with different individuals is an important research task. Through exploring possibly hindering factors, it is possible to help future participants to maximize the benefits of study abroad programs.

2.4 Benefits of Study Abroad Programs

Study abroad programs offer many advantages to the beneficiaries compared to the ones who choose to stay at home. These benefits range from intercultural competence to increased self-efficacy. Teichler (2004) provided literature with major benefits of the Erasmus program and offered a comprehensive picture of study abroad program outcomes. He classified these outcomes under four headings: academic, cultural, linguistic, and professional combining with extracurricular gains. Coleman (2013) similarly defined outcomes of a study abroad program under six categories: academic, cultural, intercultural, linguistic, personal, and professional. These categories defined both by Teichler (2004) and Coleman (2013) are also consistent with other relevant studies in the literature, so studies could be discussed under the light of these broad categories. Of course there are overlaps and there is no clear-cut boundaries among these gains; however, the key findings are still to be discussed under these categories for the sake of systematic reports.

As a general statement but a good summary of the literature, Walters, Garii, and Walters (2009) claimed that study abroad experiences promoted and enhanced intellectual growth, personal development, and global-mindedness. They emphasized the role of such programs in changing worldviews, becoming more globally-minded, embracing the diversity, and developing intercultural sensitivity and understanding (Cushner & Mahon 2002; Dooly & Villanueva, 2006; Mahan & Stachowski, 1990; Mahon & Cushner, 2002; Sahin, 2008; Van Hoof & Verbeeten, 2005). Intercultural gains, therefore, stand out as one of the biggest benefits of study abroad programs. These programs not only help participants to develop a comparative view of cultures, but also enable them to see the uniqueness of their own culture (Jackson, 2008). Deardorff (2006), for example, argued that people might re-think their worldviews

and start to reject stereotypes after spending considerable time in international environments. Anderson et al. (2006) also indicated that international students developed high levels of intercultural sensitivity and strong intercultural communication skills with a heightened cognitive sophistication.

Having an experience in a different culture or country can also be highly beneficial for teacher candidates through grasping realities of different societies, thus becoming more effective educators or intercultural communicators (Cushner & Mahon, 2002). For example, participants of the study conducted by Dooly (2010) appreciated the opportunity for experiencing the host culture and reflecting critically and interactively on different school cultures and education systems. In this interactive environment, she believed students came to understand the relativity of cultures and developed a universal understanding of cultures. However, both Dooly (2010) and Phillion et al. (2009) warned authorities about careful planning before implementing study abroad programs because they believed being in a study abroad context might not automatically turn into an intercultural competence; rather, it required reflection, interaction, and openness. Otherwise, participants may not experience multicultural and global issues in a desired way; that is why, Jacobone and Moro (2014) suggested that study abroad candidates should immerse themselves in the foreign culture both in interactive and non-interactive ways to gain intercultural competence and improve language skills.

As well as deepening cultural understanding, study abroad practices help participants learn or practice a foreign language. Besides helping participants to develop their skills in listening, writing, reading, and especially in oral skills (Freed, Segalowitz, & Dewey, 2004; Llanes et al., 2012; Magnan & Back, 2007), international programs also increase students' cultural and pragmatic competency (Reynolds-Case, 2013). They may also realize their weak and strong sides in a language, so their language awareness may increase and lead to increased motivation to learn and use the language (Allen, 2010a). However, it is the interaction with native speakers and meaningful participation in the new target community of practice that fosters acquisition (Allen, 2010a; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004), so a study abroad setting may

not be a miracle or transformative by itself for language learning. Another critical issue with the language learning in a study abroad context is the willingness shown by the host people in target community of practice because a rejection by these people may cause participants to give up their integration efforts (Allen, 2010b).

Despite the dangers of the rejection and resistance, Jacobone and Moro (2014) reported that foreign language gains were the clearest gain among Erasmus exchange students when they were compared with an experimental group of students who stayed at home university. Teichler and Janson (2007) similarly put forward that Erasmus students improved their language proficiency more than nonmobile students. Nevertheless, it is highly recommended to participate in the host culture and to interact with locals in order to maximize and optimize the language gains in contexts abroad (Kaypak & Ortactepe, 2014). Another caution is related to grouping students from the same country origin. This grouping of co-nationals may ease the adaptation process, but it may also be detrimental for linguistic and cultural gains (Magnan & Back, 2007).

As for personal gains, studies constantly reported higher self-efficacy and self-confidence beliefs after a sojourn period (Jacobone & Moro, 2014; Mahon & Cushner, 2002; Milstein, 2005) since they mostly believed surviving in a foreign culture, learning a new foreign language, and studying at a new institution affected students' self-efficacy beliefs in a more positive way. Teichler and Janson (2007) also put forward that an Erasmus experience might highly be helpful for students while developing new and distinct ways to communicate and work independently. Participants in Jacobone and Moro's (2014) study even claimed they had more personal gains than academic skills after their Erasmus experience. All these gains naturally have pushed international exchange students to think and believe they are favored in the international job market (Brown & Holloway, 2008; Kissock & Richardson, 2010). Italian exchange students, for example, believed that the Erasmus experience increased their chances of being employed (Jacobone & Moro, 2014). To support this belief, Franklin (2010) showed that study abroad programs had significant impact on long-term career paths. Teichler and Janson (2007) also

reported that ex-Erasmus students found the experience helpful in finding their first job.

Participants, on the other hand, may face the predicted problems that were given in the previous section and may fail to acquire the benefits; therefore, preparation before the experience and looking for membership in local communities may help these participants to overcome these difficulties of a study abroad experience. Otherwise it would be a terrible situation to miss these gains reported in this section, thereby preventing them from becoming interculturally and globally competent people with higher levels of language proficiency. Overall it should be noted both here and in the other parts of this literature review that these findings mostly speak for certain European or American contexts excluding the Turkish one. Moreover, all these studies up to this point have implied that the gains obtained from a study abroad program may vary among sojourners, so it is hard to generalize findings to broader levels and contexts. Individual differences (e.g., motivation, language proficiency, intercultural competence, willingness to communicate), duration of the program, preparation programs, cultural proximity, and active participation in the target culture emerge as key points to be considered and discussed while measuring the benefits of international programs.

2.5 Turkish Participants in Study Abroad Programs

Since study abroad experiences show variability (Kinging, 2009) and are quite sensitive to the personal histories and to the identities constructed in different country settings (Jewett, 2010), it is important to explore Turkish students' or particularly Turkish prospective English language teachers' international experiences in international contexts. Indeed, in the past, the opportunities were limited for Turkish participants in terms of going abroad, so their experiences are seen important after the rising popularity of the Erasmus program among them (Tekin & Hic Gencer, 2013).

The most comprehensive picture for the *hopes* and *fears* of Turkish exchange candidates has been provided by Brown and Aktas (2011, 2012). Through in-depth

interviews with Turkish undergraduate students who were about to spend a semester abroad within the Erasmus exchange program, they found very context-specific fears and hopes. First of all, their participants reported a high level of anxiety prior to their departure. When they were asked for the reasons for their worries, they listed accommodation, language skills, socialization, and food. A key aspect of these two studies was the report of concerns about their Turkish and Muslim identity. Although participants in these studies were aware of the positive changes waiting for them, they were worried about negative judgments of Turkey and Turkish society; that is why, they prepared themselves as national ambassadors. Indeed, the same fear is expressed in other studies conducted with Turkish students and most of them reported a bias toward their culture and Turkish-Muslim identity after completing their international experience (Aydin, 2012; Ersoy, 2013; Kizilaslan, 2010). Turkish participants, therefore, tend to feel a threat to their identity due to the tensions between possibly differing religious views and moral values. Thus, it is of utmost importance to learn participants' perception of host community and the host community's perception of incoming students while designing international experiences (Malewski & Phillion, 2009).

As for their hopes, it was found that Turkish students were more interested in the touristic aspects of the Erasmus program rather than benefiting from the educational possibilities offered by it. It is also interesting to see that they expected more job opportunities after completing their sojourn although they held touristic expectations. The same belief was expressed by the Turkish post-sojourners in the study conducted by Aydin (2012), so the perception of increased job opportunities as a result of study abroad was to some extent generalizable. In line with these fears and hopes, Brown and Aktas (2011, 2012) offered a number of recommendations. First, they suggested that host universities and local communities should take responsibility in informing incoming students about accommodation, language and social activities; in this sense, moving toward the center of the target community would not only depend on the efforts of sojourners, but also on the willingness of community members in terms of a mutual engagement (Jackson, 2008). In addition, students generally feel

homesick during their exchange period, so Brown and Aktas (2011, 2012) recommended that organizing regular social gatherings in the host context can help sojourners feel connected to the community. From this point of view, communication between universities should be constant so that a more systematic supervision is ensured for quality of the exchange (Yagci, Ekinici, Burgaz, Kelecioğlu, & Ergene, 2007). As for some other suggestions for Turkish participants, Ersoy and Gunel (2011) believed that observing different schools and interacting with students and teachers in these educational contexts abroad might contribute to teacher candidates' development in terms of intercultural skills.

Regarding the gains of study abroad programs for Turkish students, it is seen that there are no major differences between their gains and the ones reported by the literature for other contexts. Generally they reported that the experience increased their intercultural awareness and understanding, improved their language skills, and helped them develop personally and professionally (Aydin, 2012; Ersoy, 2013; Ersoy & Gunel, 2011; Genc Iltar, 2008; Kizilaslan, 2010; Sahin, 2008; Tekin & Hic Gencer, 2013; Unlu, 2015). Regarding the improvement of intercultural communicative competence, Tutuncu (2014) conducted a study with nine English language teachers from Turkish context who benefited from international mobility programs in the past. She found that these language teachers highly valued the influence of international mobility on their intercultural understanding and competence. Participants especially highlighted the crucial role of high motivation and personal efforts regarding the benefits offered by study abroad programs. Similarly, in another study, teacher candidates from different disciplines who completed their Erasmus program reported that they improved their language and cultural skills, but they owed most of the gains to their personal efforts and active participation (Unlu, 2015).

The problems that were experienced by Turkish international students did not show major differences from other studies conducted in different contexts. The major problems are arranging accommodation, the insufficient amount of the grant, food, tiring regulations (e.g., filling documents, choosing courses, visa procedure), the host

country's attitudes and political system, climate, adaptations to a new culture, cultural differences, and language skills (Aydin, 2012; Ersoy, 2013; Yildirim & Ilin, 2013; Yucelsin-Tas, 2013). One of the crucial points comes from Aydin's (2012) study: He found that most of the exchange students experienced significant difficulties in establishing touch with the local community. Therefore, he suggested that more intensive language courses, orientation programs, and informing host universities and local communities should be ensured. He also showed the burden of formal procedures and the insufficient amount of the grant on exchange students and asked for necessary steps to be taken. Moreover, the most frequent suggestion by these studies was the lack of preparation programs for outgoing exchange students in which they can be prepared for language, cultural, personal, and professional issues (Kizilaslan 2010; Yildirim & Ilin, 2013).

The need for preparing candidates is indeed a common theme among studies from different sociocultural settings (Allen & Dupuy, 2013; Byram & Dervin, 2008; Goldoni, 2013; Jackson, 2008; Marx & Moss, 2011; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008). Interestingly, most Turkish participants were pre-service English language teachers and they were or about to be an Erasmus exchange student. Their gains and problems were not too different from the students with different sociocultural backgrounds. However, religious and national identities caused them to experience some unique problems like facing bias toward their background and religious views. This bias sometimes prevented them from participating fully in their imagined communities.

2.6 Imagined Communities and Language Learners or Teachers

Second language learners have direct access to the communities where the language they learn is spoken by the local community; however, foreign language learners lack this access to real communities and they are perceived as less advantaged (Kinging, 2004). However, it is believed that imagined communities can also function as real ones and motivate language learners to invest in the language they learn (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Norton, 2000, 2001). These learners may not interact with the target community but they feel like a part of that community through imagination. Such an example is Alice in Kinginger's (2004) study. She was a highly motivated American

learner of French before she lived in France. When she started to live in France, she often faced difficulties and even was excluded by her classmates. She engaged in different ways of negotiations including social, linguistic, gender, and class identity. Although she was highly motivated prior to her departure, her initial experiences acted more like a demotivator. During the first times in the culture, she even considered the idea of giving up. However, she did not give in to that negative situation and persisted in her efforts to integrate into the target culture; as a result, she made new friends outside the school and recovered her motivation. In that regard, imagined and real may have conflicts; thus, it is crucial to understand personal histories of participants in international programs so that their participation and their ways of handling problems could be better understood. Indeed, the most effective ways to sustain imagined identities in imagined communities are thought to be perseverance and agency in case of discomfort or rejection (Xu, 2013).

The *imagined communities* concept is also used to understand variability among study abroad sojourners because gains for each participant may change in study abroad experiences (Kinging, 2009). In such international contexts, people may experience challenges or difficulties, and the process they go through may shake their established worldviews and identity. Such processes are highly likely to take place because sometimes the imagined community may have conflict with the real one. In such cases, participants may act as a closed group to the target culture or resist participating as in the case of Alice. These processes may also be painful and cause discomfort or anxiety; however, perseverance or agency results in intercultural awareness and higher empathy as a result of active participation in communities of practice (Kinging, 2013). In fact, international students generally suffer from challenges directed to their national identity, which may result in avoidance of “negotiation of difference” (Block, 2007, p. 864). Therefore, study abroad is not a magic by itself; on the contrary, it requires participants to invest, put in effort, take agency, take actions, and even persist in difficulties so that they can benefit from what study abroad programs promise.

Trentman (2013) used the imagined communities concept to understand the experiences of international students and compared imagined communities of American learners of Arabic in an Egyptian context with their real communities of practice. They assigned two roles to themselves during the period: cross-cultural mediator and language learner. In order to accomplish these two roles, they had to engage in a real touch with Arabic people, and they tried to join in different communities of practice in the target culture such as classes, sports teams or some other social groups. They found many chances to discuss issues with local people and grow both personally and professionally; however, there were some other Americans who preferred to spend their time with American people and spoke English for most of the time. They neither developed their language skills nor established a cross-cultural mediator role. On the contrary, those in the rugby team were able to practice their Arabic skills, and spent a considerable amount of time to gain a full-fledged membership in that real community. As a result, they became a part of their imagined community and showed progress in many ways. This study raised a number of important aspects regarding investment, real and imagined communities of practice, and helped the literature to understand the variability of gains among sojourners to some extent. In the end of the study, the researcher underscored the importance of informing the participants about the critical issues prior to their departure so that they could re-organize their ideas and feelings about study abroad and also could plan their investment in the experience.

Norton and Kamal (2003) also examined the imagined communities of Pakistani middle school students. They found that these people felt connected to the rest of the world through their English language skills, so English gave them an access to the global world through their imagination and their real investment in the language. Their imagination of their own country was also based on reality rather than on fantasy; therefore, they built their imagined communities on many complex facets and dynamics of their current context and identity. Asian immigrant parents in the study conducted by Dagenais (2003) similarly imagined that their children would gain an access to the legitimate Canadian community. These studies showed that the

imagined communities concept carried significant potential in terms of exploring goals and motivations based on the dynamics of past, present and future. Overall study abroad or international exchange programs promise a variety of attainments (e.g., increased language proficiency, global awareness, and intercultural competence) for language learners or pre- and in-service language teachers from different contexts; however, these programs stipulate an active participation in local communities. This participation is not an easy task to achieve and shows variability among people from different contexts, so exploring personal histories and thought patterns of exchange students prior to their sojourn may help these programs to revise their actions and modify them if it is necessary.

2.7 Need for the Study

There are a number of ongoing efforts nowadays to increase the international exchange opportunities in Europe. European Commission, in that regard, promotes youth mobility through the Bologna process and the Lisbon strategy (Souto-Otero et al., 2013). The commission apparently finds exchange programs beneficial to the European Union (EU)'s aims. However, research shows that the studies conducted in this field still fail to provide complete picture of participants from different contexts with a greater depth and breadth; furthermore, they usually concentrate on the outcomes of the programs (Brindley et al., 2009; Jackson, 2008; Jacobone & Moro, 2014; Li, Olson, & Frieze, 2013; Phillion & Malewski, 2009); therefore, there is an implicit research call in order to help national governments and supra-national organizations to increase the number of mobility students and to maximize benefits of the programs through exploring thought patterns of the candidates from different contexts. For example, Li et al., (2013) urge researchers to understand outgoing students' characteristics in order to assist educators or program organizers and to attract more international students. Botas and Huisman (2013) add that little is known about the participants of Erasmus program in terms of their awareness, readiness, and motivation.

The literature on study abroad programs or on the Erasmus exchange program also shows that there is a serious lack of in-depth qualitative studies (Aydin, 2012). This

insufficiency is compounded regarding the experiences and preconceptions of pre-service English language teachers from Turkey (Aydin, 2012; Genc Iltar, 2013; Kizilaslan, 2010). Moreover, the existing studies in the broad literature of study abroad mostly cover the experiences of American students (Collentine, 2009; Kinginger, 2013), so researchers are recommended to examine participants from different cultural backgrounds including different contexts across Europe. Similarly, Juvan and Lesjak (2011) and Lesjak et al., (2015) highlight that mobility motivation is largely shaped by personal and situational characteristics, so they draw attention to qualitative scientific work with students from different contexts. All these points raise a need for an in-depth study targeting Turkish pre-service English teachers who are engaged in the Erasmus exchange program.

On the other hand, most studies stress the importance of further studies in investigating study abroad in teacher education because it is believed that this field still “remains under-researched, under-theorized and under-evaluated” (Phillion et al., 2009, p. 325) although international programs have started to gain an importance in English language teacher education due to their intercultural and international aspects (Barkhuizen & Feryok, 2006). The researchers, therefore, suggest that further studies need to be conducted so that people who are in charge of educating language teachers can evaluate the benefits and promises of such programs and take necessary steps (Barkhuizen & Feryok, 2006; Lee, 2009; Yang, 2011). As the literature review has shown, major gap in the literature is a lack of comprehensive and detailed picture of pre-service English teachers’ thought patterns and lived experiences prior to their international exchange experience. Most studies only touch on the issue and leave it incomplete. It is, however, important to explore these issues in-depth because these people seem to be having difficulties in participating in the target culture and may lack major gains. Thus, it is still full of doubt whether they fully benefit from the Erasmus exchange program and enhance their language teacher education. As an initiative step, in order to provide a depth to the literature, a comprehensive picture of outgoing students is required to inform authorities about how to include prospective English language teachers from Turkish context in the communities of

practice abroad; in this way, people can expect clear outcomes and preparation. The experiences of Turkish students are particularly important as Turkey is one of the top sending countries among participating 34 European countries (European Commission, 2015).

In a parallel sense, Liu and Cai (2013) state that there are few studies that have examined students' expectations and worries prior to the sojourn. They believe a preparation prior to the experience may help participants to set more realistic goals, more intercultural awareness, and more confidence toward studying abroad. The idea of preparation indeed is supported by a considerable number of studies (Dekaney, 2008; Goldstein & Kim, 2006). In this study, it is possible to check whether there is such a need for Turkish pre-service English teachers and to what degree they are ready to gain benefits from the exchange program. This is important to check because it is known that the Erasmus program offers abounding benefits; however, there could also be some risks that may prevent participants from active participation (Souto-Otero et al., 2013). In that regard, it is a common warning in the literature that students' attitudes and expectations prior to the program may significantly influence the outcomes and the quality of the participation (Coleman, 1998; Dekaney, 2008, Jacobone & Moro, 2014; Teichler, 2004).

On the other hand, Ryan (2006) complains about the limited number of studies examining imagined communities of people in language learning and teaching field since he believes this community must envision a variety of imagined communities due to their connections to the outer world through the knowledge of foreign languages. He also calls for in-depth qualitative inquiries to investigate imagined communities and the ways how these people seek for membership in them. Trent (2013) also emphasizes the lack of research utilizing imagined communities as a theoretical framework for study abroad research. Trent's (2013) and Kinginger's (2004) studies are indeed only ones in this area.

Under the light of all these points that show the gap in the literature, this study chooses to provide a comprehensive picture of Turkish pre-service English teachers who have chosen to be an Erasmus exchange student in England. Their lived

preparation experiences prior to their exchange are the focus of this study. While exploring their experiences, the possible influences of past and future on their thought patterns are also considered. In the setting from which participants were selected, to my best knowledge, there is no study conducted to investigate lived experiences of English language teacher candidates during their preparation period prior to the international exchange period.

In the context where this study is conducted participation in the Erasmus program started in 2004 but the first exchange happened in 2006 with only one student. Each year this number increased. According to the international office of the university where this study is conducted, in the 2013-2014 academic year, the number of pre-service English teachers who benefited from this program was 27. Moreover, a total number of 138 pre-service English teachers in this setting have benefited from the Erasmus program so far (METU ICO, 2015). This number is significant because the number of students who benefited from the program from Faculty of Education is 160. The total number for the whole university is 1039 covering 38 different departments; therefore, the number of language teacher candidates is relatively high and significant. It is possibly because of their high English language proficiency and cumulative grade point average (CGPA), which are the criteria in order to be selected as a candidate for the Erasmus exchange program. The students studying at Languages and Philosophical Sciences in fact have an important position in the overall number of students who benefited from the Erasmus program in all Europe between 2009 and 2013 (Brandenburg et al., 2014). Thus, it is an important step here to understand their experiences related to the exchange program.

This study accordingly focuses on EU's exchange programs, more specifically on the *Erasmus+* program because participants of the present study are nominated to benefit from this program. Overall, this study aims to both explore the lived and imagined experiences of the Turkish pre-service English language teachers, who chose to benefit from the *Erasmus+* program, during their preparation period in order to offer a holistic and an in-depth picture to the people or to the institutions concerned in both Turkish and international contexts since recruiting students for the Erasmus

program through systematic steps and exposing them to an international experience may not be enough to maintain the quality and gains of the program particularly regarding language and cultural learning (Van Hoof & Verbeeten, 2005). Therefore, individual differences in terms of motives, attitudes, dispositions as well as the quality of preparation and guidance play a significant role in the outcomes of a study abroad program; that's why, the *before* part of a study abroad program has a powerful impact on the *during* and *after* stages of a study abroad program. However, one important caveat would be that this study does not aim to establish facts or generalize findings to all Turkish candidates or to all people living in Turkey, the aim is rather to show the emergence and construction of the preparation period which is shaped around *individuals'* complex, dialogic, dynamic, and evolving lifeworlds which are possibly influenced by local and global dynamics (Dervin, 2011). The cohort of the participating students was, therefore, conceptually treated as a heterogeneous group representing themselves but coming from a Turkish context.

2.8 Purpose Statement and Research Questions

First of all, as stated before, there is a research gap in the field of English language teacher education in terms of short-term international exchange experiences. Thus, this study aims to explore lived and imagined experiences of Turkish pre-service English language teachers who are preparing to study in England as Erasmus exchange students. With the help of a phenomenological investigation of their preparation experiences, the study aims to have an in-depth understanding of their experiences from the decision-making process to the final day at home context; in this way, by combining lived experiences before and after being selected as an Erasmus candidate, it is possible to understand complex decision-making process and context-specific experiences prior to study abroad. It should be noted again that lived experiences are specified as the ones during the decision-making process and preparation period.

As for the imagined part of the experiences, it is aimed to understand participants' thought patterns regarding motivations, plans, expectations, concerns, predicted challenges toward their future international experience and to predict their

participation and investment as it is of crucial importance for them to engage in intense interaction with locals and the target society in order to maximize and optimize their intercultural experiences and gains including intercultural competence, language proficiency, life skills, understanding of different education systems, and improving global teacherhood. Their preconceptions and sociocultural background are, therefore, important to be explored as it is known that an international experience is not only limited to linguistics issues but also involves in sociocultural and intercultural elements (Coleman, 1998), so having a certain level of English proficiency, which is the case for participants in this study, is not a good predictor for the quality of an international experience although it could play a crucial role for active human agency in an English-speaking country (Sawir, Marginson, Forbes-Mewett, Nyland, & Ramia, 2012). Individual and in-depth voices are, thus, valued since they help us to develop an in-depth understanding of what candidates go through before their experience. In addition to exploring the lived and imagined experiences, it is also aimed to understand how the Erasmus program can contribute to participants' ongoing language teacher education from their own perspectives and reports in order to inform teacher educators about the promises of short-term international experiences from the perspective of teacher candidates.

Overall, two main conceptual pillars of this study are:

- *Phenomenology* to understand lived experiences which paved the way for decision-making and to explore the preparation experiences prior to the exchange period,
- *Imagined communities* or imagined experiences to understand future-oriented thought patterns regarding the study abroad period with a sociocultural framework.

These two pillars can provide us with a thorough understanding of Turkish prospective English language teachers' lived experiences and thought patterns prior to international exchange programs or more specifically prior to the Erasmus exchange program. As a result, it is expected to offer a comprehensive picture for study abroad and English teacher education literature in terms of the thought patterns

of Turkish pre-sojourners, and a number of recommendations are to emerge for policy makers, the Erasmus or study abroad program officials, English language teacher educators, and future exchange or international students in both Turkish and other international contexts. The findings may also help the planning and implementation of more effective short- or long-term international programs for English language teacher candidates with a Turkish or any other international origin.

In line with the aims and the conceptual framework of this study, research questions for this study are:

- 1) What are the lived experiences of the prospective English language teachers before their international exchange period?
 - a) What are the lived experiences which motivate them to apply for the Erasmus exchange program?
 - b) What did they experience during their preparation period?
 - c) What does the decision to study abroad mean to the individual?
 - d) What meaning do they ascribe to their preparations?
- 2) How do the prospective English language teachers construct their imagined communities and imagined experiences before their international exchange period takes place?
 - a) How do they describe their imagined experiences and imagined communities related to their upcoming Erasmus experience?
 - b) What kind or level of participation in the imagined community do they foresee?
 - c) What are their motivations, plans, expectations, and concerns for their upcoming international experiences?
 - d) What kind of challenges or difficulties do they predict for themselves and how are they planning to overcome these challenges?
- 3) How do the prospective English language teachers anticipate the Erasmus exchange program will contribute to their ongoing language teacher education process?

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Presentation

In a scientific study, research questions and design are expected to match each other; in this sense, researchers are accountable for coming up with a sound methodology in accordance with the aim and research questions of a study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Since the literature review highlighted the scarcity of Turkish participants' or English language teacher candidates' experiences in international programs, it was appropriate, first, to conduct an in-depth investigation with a cohort of prospective English language teachers who were selected to participate in the Erasmus program. A qualitative research method meets the aim of the study due to its interest in in-depth description and analysis of lived experiences around common phenomena among certain groups of people (Creswell, 2012). Moreover, as the literature review has also showed, international experiences are highly individual; thus, a qualitative approach is a better option to understand the complex and dynamic experiences (Coleman, 2013). Therefore, with the help of qualitative data collection tools and analysis processes, it is aimed to reveal complexities and dynamics concerning the phenomenon of *preparation* for the Erasmus exchange program from Turkish prospective English teachers' perspective.

In order to bring a clarification to the qualitative understanding of this study, a few more detailed points are necessary since qualitative research is known for its diversity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) and definitions of qualitative research vary (Kuckartz, 2014). Qualitative paradigms enable researchers to explore subjective meanings embedded in idiographic understanding of people and help readers to understand what particular phenomena within their social reality mean for them (Bryman, 1988). “[I]ndividual trajectories are in fact the essence of recent study abroad research, in which the focus has shifted from quantitative to qualitative, from

product to process, from a search for generalizability to a recognition of complexity and variation.” (Coleman, 2013, p. 25). Therefore, the underexplored issue of study abroad in language teacher education context could be approached with a detailed qualitative analysis of individual accounts. The following definition and explanation given by Creswell (2012) shaped the idiographic understanding in this qualitative phenomenological study:

Qualitative research begins with assumption and the use of interpretative/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of the participants, the reflexivity of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change. (p. 44)

In accordance with Creswell’s (2012) definition, this study broadly adapted *funnel approach* of qualitative design (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009). In this approach, the steps in Figure 1 were taken into account.

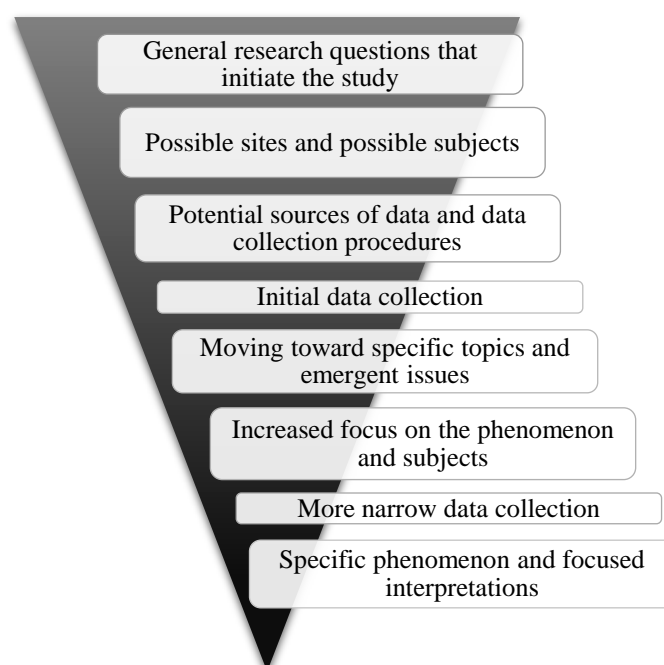


Figure 1. Funnel approach of qualitative design adapted for this study (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009, p. 244).

These steps above were adapted for the methodological practice of this study by remaining loyal to its *funnel* understanding, and all the details related to research methodology including participant selection, data collection and analysis are given in the upcoming sections, but before presenting sites and subjects, it is more appropriate to provide the philosophical and methodological background for sampling, data collection and analysis procedures.

3.1 Phenomenology

A group of German philosophers ventured into a new interpretive science in 20th century as an opposition to empiricism. They relied on individuals' own construction of everyday life instead of empirical research. This approach, which is called phenomenology, basically seeks for the personal experiences in order to explore how people experience a phenomenon and to understand what the phenomenon means for them (van Manen, 1990). Titchen and Hobson (2005) define phenomenology as “the study of lived, human phenomena within the everyday social contexts in which the phenomena occur from the perspective of those who experience them. Phenomena comprise any thing that human beings live/experience.” (p. 121). In line with this definition, it is possible to argue that it does not purely aim to give answers to a phenomenon; on the contrary, it is philosophical diligence to *describe* lived experiences in a particular time at a particular context (Groenewald, 2004; Willig, 2008).

Edmund Husserl was the person who laid the foundations of phenomenology. His main questions were “What are the things themselves? How to perceive and conceive them?”. In order to answer these questions, he made a distinction between *noesis* (what) and *noema* (how) of a phenomenon (Dowling, 2007; Eberle, 2014; King & Horrocks, 2010). To illustrate these two concepts, King and Horrocks (2010) give the example of a cat which is playing with a ball of wool. The noematic focus for this cat would be the content of cat's actions; however, noetic focus would be on the meaning of this action for the attending people, and the meanings attached to this action may differ for each person. One could be fascinated by the actions of the cat but another one could be nervous for the cat may break something in the

surroundings. The appearance of a specific phenomenon, thus, depends on the perceiver's *intentionality*.

Husserl believes that the noema and noesis constitute a phenomenon; therefore, he defends the existence of an objective property and subjective experiences of a phenomenon. It could well be said that he rejects the aporia of empiricism, which separates the subjective and objective world as Descartes separated mind and body (Eberle, 2014). As for Husserlian phenomenological analysis, the aim is to find *eidos* of a phenomenon or, in other words, the essence of the phenomenon. Eberle (2014), in this sense, gives the example of a cube. He explains that a cube is still a cube even if it has a different color or size, but if you change its shape, it is no longer a cube. The essence of a cube is, therefore, its basic properties which make it to be called a cube. Thus, "[t]he purpose of the phenomenological research is to describe the structure of an experience, not to describe the characteristics of a group who have had the experience." (Polkinghorne, 1989). Husserl argues that in order to reach at this essence of the phenomenon one should revise and elucidate his/her assumptions, presuppositions or attitudes toward a phenomenon; only in this way, he believes the researcher can reveal the *eidos* of the things (Dowling, 2007; Eberle, 2014). He calls this as *epoche* or *bracketing*, which means one should be reflexive during a phenomenological investigation to put aside all the subjective assumptions in order to dive in the essence of the phenomenon as they are experienced by the participants.

Before moving to the different ways of phenomenological research in social sciences, it is important to know that two major approaches exist in phenomenology as they are presented by Titchen and Hobson (2005). The first one is called the direct approach in which a phenomenon is presented in the consciousness of the people who experience it. The researcher in this direct approach is the one who looks at the phenomenon as an outsider. In the other approach, which is called indirect approach, it is required to feel and experience the social context of the phenomenon. The researcher lives the phenomenon as it takes place in this indirect approach. In the former one, the researcher asks participants to reflect on their subjective experiences related to the phenomenon being investigated. The job of the researcher is to

transform these lived experiences told by the participants to objective constructions through interpretation. In the indirect approach, researchers have to immerse themselves in participants' lifeworld. Edmund Husserl is the father of the direct approach while Martin Heidegger is on the side of indirect approach with an existential orientation. This direct and indirect division actually implies differences between philosophers' ideas toward phenomenology.

Since phenomenology is not only a research methodology but also a philosophy, there are different voices among philosophers who approached it (Dowling, 2007). The group who calls themselves as descriptive or transcendental phenomenologists follows the tradition established by Husserl. These people such as Giorgi (1970) and Moustakas (1994) believe it is possible to bracket researcher's subjectivity and to reach the pure existence of a phenomenon despite the interpretative nature of phenomenology. As an opposing voice to Husserl and transcendental phenomenology, Martin Heidegger, and later Merleau-Ponty, claimed that the individual is strongly rooted in the world so it cannot be separated from it. They, thus, defend the impossibility of direct access to the subjective experiences of other people, so they do not believe that a researcher can empathize with people who perceive and experience the phenomenon. Thus, an interpretive or hermeneutic emphasis takes place in Heidegger's understanding of phenomenology.

Some people who adopt Heidegger's existential approach study in the framework called interpretative phenomenology. These researchers such as van Manen (1990) and Smith (1996a) believe it is actually important to bracket experiences in a systematic way; however, they also believe that data analysis will always reflect the researcher's own view of the world due to the impossibility of gaining access to direct experiences of participants. The researcher, as a result, interprets participants' experiences based on his/her own accounts (Smith, 2004). However, it is possible for interpretative phenomenology to gain a description of the invariant structure of a phenomenon, which reflects essential features of the phenomenon that is prevalent across the different contexts (Smith, 2004). Overall existential and interpretative

phenomenologists are more concerned with the description and interpretation of people's *lifeworld* instead of dealing with essences.

As for the introduction of phenomenology to social sciences as a research methodology, Alfred Schutz is seen as the pioneer (Eberle, 2014). Giorgi (1970) was another person who took the initiative to use phenomenological philosophy in psychology. Moreover, Smith (1996a) and van Manen (1990) were the scholars who developed phenomenology in psychology in different directions following Giorgi. There was also differing voices among these people in terms of the essence of the phenomena. Smith (1996a) notably asserts that data and analysis will always be deficient because it is never possible to understand all the complexities involved in construction of a phenomenon. His interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) avoids a pure Husserlian or transcendental phenomenology but has a close relationship with hermeneutic phenomenology through Heidegger and Gadamer since he believes in the interpretative nature of phenomenological analysis (Eatough & Smith, 2007). This study adopts IPA approach to the investigation of the phenomenon *English language teacher candidates' preparation for the Erasmus exchange program*. The rationale behind this choice is to be explained in the next section.

3.2 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

IPA is concerned with the meanings and importance attached to ordinary everyday experiences and tries to understand how particular people make sense and treat these experiences such as major transitions or decisions in their life when they bear a particular significance (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Eatough and Smith (2007) explain this approach as:

IPA attends to all aspects of [the] lived experience, from the individual's wishes, desires, feelings, motivations, belief systems through to how these manifest themselves or not in behavior and action. Whatever phenomenon is being studied, the emphasis is on 'what is it like to be experiencing this or that for this particular person' (p. 181).

This view of IPA supports the symbolic interactionist accounts since it sees sociocultural and historical processes as central to the subjective experiences of

phenomena (Stryker, 2008). Symbolic interactionist paradigm, overall, argues that a phenomenon in real life exists without any meanings attached to it, but individuals and groups interpret it and attribute meanings to them in the process of interaction and symbols (Stryker, 2008). George Herbert Mead was the person who laid the foundation of the symbolic interactionism and acknowledged the impact of social acts on the *mind* and *self*. In his understanding, people interpret and manipulate symbols in social interactions so as to avoid potential communication problems. Therefore, society shapes *self* and *self* creates society through interaction; thus, social life is a dynamic process that is constantly being created and re-created through symbolic interaction (Stryker, 2008). Later, it was Herbert George Blumer who coined the term *symbolic interactionism* for the first time. Blumer, a student and follower of Mead, emphasized the interpretive nature of meaning construction processes in social world and how those processes have an effect on the understandings and actions of the individual. Besides acknowledging this crucial role of social networks and contexts on individual meaning-making processes, Blumer also emphasized the importance of inner dialogue; according to him, *self* was a product of both one's interactions with himself/herself and with the social world.

Following all these critical points on Mead's and Blumer's symbolic interactionist views, three basic assumptions behind Blumer's symbolic interactionist perspective are given as follows (Benzies & Allen, 2001; Blumer, 1969; Eroz-Tuga, 2015): (1) The world exists in its objective state without any individual meanings attached to it, but individuals interpret it through the use of symbols (language) in social interactional processes. (2) Meaning emerges as a result of those interactional processes among the individuals, so the ability to act arises among individuals following an agreement on the symbols or meanings ascribed to things in their environment. (3) These meanings are also re-negotiated among the individuals; they agree on the meanings and act accordingly through symbolic interactionism. In line with these interactionist arguments, *self* is constantly negotiated in interaction with others in a reciprocal relationship (Blumer, 1969). From a broader perspective, humans have their active agency and freedom in meaning construction, but they are

bounded by societal and cultural norms, too. Moreover, individuals adopt different roles and identities in their daily life depending on the context and their interlocutors (Goffman, 1959); therefore, this understanding assumes that individuals can have multiple identities, interaction repertoires, and action sequences based on the roles they embrace in their daily life (Eroz-Tuga, 2015); that's why, it is important to explore human interactions in different social contexts or structures.

Overall symbolic interactionism does not separate the individual and social context; furthermore, it views truth as fluid and socially negotiated around human interactions. This view of symbolic interactionism basically treats human beings as agents of their social worlds who create intersubjective interpretations through interactions with other people (Eatough & Smith, 2007), albeit their acts are constrained by societal and cultural norms. Therefore, reality is what individuals and groups of people negotiate on (Aksan, Kisac, Aydin, & Demirbukan, 2009). Smith and Osborn (2007), in this direction, state that IPA is in a close relationship with symbolic interactionism since it suggests that meanings are created within both social and personal world, so the results revealed by a phenomenological researcher is not the *truth*; rather, it is the truth that the researcher and participants bring to the front under the light of their experiences and knowledge (Spencer, Pryce, & Walsh, 2014). To give an example that may establish the connection between symbolic interactionism and the present study, Serpe and Stryker's (1987) study with college students showed that students seek to create new ties when they are in a new social setting, but they do not lose their connection to pre-existing identities; rather, they negotiate those salient identities while forming new social relationships. Therefore, in the present study, such symbolic interactionist arguments are critical in understanding the identities and personal histories from a sociocultural perspective in order to predict the symbolic interactional processes in host social communities.

IPA is also in a close relationship with hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation, which implies that the central concerns of people are accessible through an interpretative process (Smith et al., 2009). In this view, "meaning is negotiated mutually in the act of interpretation; it is not simply discovered" (Schwandt, 2000, p.

195). The understandings of the researcher is, therefore, always in the realm of his own lifeworld, and his interpretations are based on the meaning making of the participants, which is called double hermeneutics by IPA scholars (Smith et al., 2009). IPA seemingly does not neglect social interactions and personal meaning makings since it acknowledges the knowledge ascribed to a phenomenon is also the product of the social interactions between actors. Furthermore, it rejects a fixed reality that could be grasped without the mediation of human mind (Schwandt, 2000). This symbolic interactionist and hermeneutic view ensures that IPA does not entirely look for idiosyncratic personal interpretations; it also implicates researcher's existence; so, it is of crucial importance to bracket personal experiences and assumptions. Thus, according to IPA, it is possible to offer a sound picture of a phenomenon through the narrations of subjective experiences, and bracketing the researcher's understanding of the phenomenon.

Although it acknowledges the researcher's existence and co-construction of the meaning, IPA is in essence idiographic (i.e., what sense a particular person makes of the experiences that happen to them) focusing on particularity rather than universality (Smith et al., 2009). For IPA, the utmost importance is put on the uncovering individual subjective experiences. Thus, the term *lived experiences* is used to underscore the subjective nature of phenomena which are shaped by historical, social, and cultural elements embedded in the world. However, through cross-case analyses, it also enables researchers to have broader themes, thereby getting closer to the *essence*. In order to protect its idiographic commitment, IPA studies limit the number of their participant to manageable numbers as three to six (Smith et al., 2009).

Eatough and Smith (2007) claim that IPA is more modest than transcendental phenomenology and think it is still developing. Willig (2008) also claims that it is a new and developing approach with more room for creativity and freedom, so he recommends it to novice researchers who are interested in phenomenology with no philosophical background. Overall, answering questions like *what does it mean to be an Erasmus exchange student candidate?* can be understood to a significant extent

and in a detailed way through an interpretative phenomenological lens. Since it is modest in its aims, suitable for novice phenomenological researchers, and recognizes the importance of bracketing as in the transcendental phenomenology, it presents an ideal way for this study to explore the experiences of pre-sojourners. The study, thus, describes and documents lived experiences in a reflexive and detailed way.

In summary, there is no right or wrong in phenomenology, and it does not have an aim of generalizing the findings to larger communities; rather, it aims to reach the essence of the phenomenon by setting all the judgments aside in order to grasp the nature of the lived experiences (Willig, 2008). IPA is, therefore, a rigorous inductive endeavor to understand complexity of the lived experiences through the eyes and voices of the people who lived them. While digging into participants' experiences, it benefits from the hermeneutics, symbolic interactionism, and idiographic commitment. This study, in a sense, tries to explore how participants handle their perfectly familiar self during the process of their preparation which is perfectly foreign to them. The utmost aim by adopting this methodology is to leave readers with a feeling of *nodding* in the end, which shows how well they have understood what these people go through and experience prior to the Erasmus program. They may also have a hunch as to whether participants will be able to integrate into target society or not. There might also be some new insights into the invisibility of these people's experiences.

In order to establish a methodological coherence in the study, loyalty is well preserved for IPA. This methodology allowed the researcher to handle the complex and even messy set of data to understand and analyze systematically in line with the conceptual framework and aims of the study. Moreover, as a previous Erasmus student, it was also a must for the researcher to bracket his experiences in order to present a sound description of the lived experiences. One of the upcoming sections (i.e., 3.8.1 Role of the Researcher in this Study, p.80) before presenting findings is reserved for that bracketing purpose.

Overall, in this study, the following methodological practice of IPA is followed:

- Research questions are directed toward aspects of lived experience;
- the idiographic commitment encourages the study of small homogenous samples;
- semi-structured interviews are the exemplary data collection method for IPA;
- other methods include diaries, unstructured life history interviews;
- data collection is dialogical with the participant taking a significant role in determining what is said;
- analysis is an iterative inductive process, beginning with several close detailed readings to provide a holistic perspective, noting points of interest and significance;
- step-by-step analysis then proceeds to the description of analytic themes and their interconnections, taking care always to preserve a link back to the original account;
- analysis continues into the writing-up stage and finishes with a narrative of both participant's and researchers meaning making of the topic under investigation;
- ideally the final narrative should move between levels of interpretation: from rich description through to abstract and more conceptual interpretations. (Eatough & Smith, 2007, p. 187).

All these points above are explained in detail in the upcoming sections which include processes related to the sampling, data collection and analysis.

3.3 Research Setting, Application Process for the Erasmus Program, and Participant Selection

All the information in this section about application procedure for the Erasmus program was collected by the researcher through participating to one of the introductory meetings and with the help of the official website of the International Cooperations Office (ICO) at the research context. First of all, students who consider applying for Erasmus grant must complete at least one semester of their academic program before the application period, and the applications are received for the following academic year. Undergraduate students who consider applying for the Erasmus exchange program are expected to have at least 2.5 CGPA. Next, during the application period, they use a digital online system to make choices among the

available universities. This system lists all the possible universities depending upon the program they are registered to. The order of the choices made by the applicants is taken into account.

After they make the host university choices, they are required to take English Proficiency Exam for Exchange Programs (EPEEP) which is prepared and carried out by the home university. Following the exam results, 50 % of CGPA and 50 % of the language test score are taken into account while ranking the applicants. Once they are placed into a host university, it is not possible to change it. For all applicants in this research context, this application period took place between February 3, 2015 and February 22, 2015, and they took EPEEP on February 28, 2015. Final results were announced on March 27, 2015 exactly one month after the EPEEP. A list of selected students was announced by ICO on their official website. This list included all the university students who were eligible to take part in the Erasmus program. In this list, a search for pre-service English language teachers was conducted and a list of 39 students was obtained. The distribution of the pre-service English language teachers according to the host countries and universities are provided in Table 1.

Table 1.

The numeric distribution of the selected pre-service English language teachers according to the host countries and universities

Country (Total Number)	The Host University	Number of Eligible Pre-service English Language Teachers
England (6)	Keele University	6
	University of Pavia	3
Italy (6)	Università degli Studi "G. d'Annunzio" Chieti	2
	Rome Tre University	1
Germany (9)	University of Cologne	2
	University of Konstanz	3
	Leuphana Universität Lüneburg	4
Spain (8)	University of Granada	4
	Universidad de Deusto	4
Sweden (3)	Linköping University	3

Table (cont'd)		
Poland (3)	Pedagogical University of Cracow	3
Greece (4)	National and Kapodistrian University of Athens	4
		Total Number = 39

Before they started their application process to the host university, they had to inform their advisors at ICO before April 3, 2015 via e-mail regarding during which semester (i.e., fall or spring) they would like to study, so this one-week period following the announcement can be considered as a final decision-making time. The researcher waited for their replies to their advisors before contacting them. After April 3 and the participants' final decisions, the researcher sent first e-mail on April 7, 2015 to each of these selected 39 students and asked them to inform him if they intended to participate in the Erasmus program for 2015-2016 fall semester and if they were willing to participate in this study. In the following a few days, 8 people answered the e-mail and stated their willingness to participate in the study.

Again, on April 9, 2015, the researcher sent another e-mail to make sure everyone who chose to study abroad for fall semester replied to his call. After sending this e-mail, another 3 people also agreed to participate. The number reached at this time to 11. Next, the researcher contacted ICO and the student exchange support group in the research context for the possible inclusion of other people who considered studying abroad during the fall semester. Moreover, one last e-mail was sent to the people who did not respond the e-mails. After these efforts to look for other potential participants, the researcher ensured that the final number was 11. The information about in which country and at which university these 11 students were nominated to study is given in Table 2.

Table 2.

The country and university choice of the students who chose to study abroad during fall semester

Participants Who Replied the Call for This Study	University and Country Placement
Participant 1	Keele University – England
Participant 2	Keele University – England
Participant 3	Keele University – England
Participant 4	Rome Tre University - Italy
Participant 5	Università degli Studi "G. d'Annunzio" Chieti - Italy
Participant 6	University of Pavia - Italy
Participant 7	Università degli Studi "G. d'Annunzio" Chieti - Italy
Participant 8	Leuphana Universität Lüneburg - Germany
Participant 9	University of Konstanz - Germany
Participant 10	University of Granada - Spain
Participant 11	Linköping University - Sweden

Since phenomenology refuses subjective-objective dichotomy and is more concerned with particularity, complexity, and in-depth descriptions, a homogeneous sample of people who experience a common phenomenon is suggested (Creswell, 2012; Smith & Osborn, 2007). Furthermore, Creswell (2012) gives the number of participants as varying from 3-4 to 10-15. Influential researchers using IPA methodology also offer a homogeneous sample of people who experience a phenomenon (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Smith et al. (2009) suggest this number for a typical IPA study as three to six since they recommend researchers to focus on small sample sizes; otherwise, with a large group of people, the researcher may sacrifice the details for the sake of common or broader themes. “The focus is of course on qualitative issues, not quantitative ones” (Hycner, 1985, p. 295) because a phenomenological researcher does not aim to generalize findings but to illuminate human phenomena with detailed accounts of individual experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

In line with these suggestions and with IPA, it was thought that the experiences of the three students who chose to study in England would be the most suitable ones for

the aims of this study and for their ongoing English language teacher education since the country choice was highly relevant for their language learning history and language teaching career. England is indeed an important destination as it is one of the five main destinations for Erasmus students (European Commission, 2015; Gonzalez et al., 2011). The focus of this study, therefore, was on the preparation experiences of these three candidates for England. In fact, Smith et al. (2009) view the number three as very useful for a master's degree IPA study because they believe this number may yield more detailed analyses of cases and more illustrative differences and similarities across cases. For the final sampling procedure, a criterion-based sampling strategy was adopted (Creswell, 2012) and these were the criteria defined:

- studying abroad for the first time because living in a foreign culture and education system for a long time may interfere with the description of lived experiences and imagined communities;
- being eligible and determined to be a part of the Erasmus exchange program because it is always the case that a certain number of people change their mind even months after being selected;
- studying abroad in the fall semester of 2015-2016 because this is the semester following their decision to study abroad, and they immediately start their preparations. This criterion emerged also as a result of the time concern of this study since a spring semester choice would not make this study possible in the given time for a master's thesis.

After applying these criteria to the intended participants, a total number of three candidates were chosen as participants for this study. Their background information (i.e., gender, age, year of study, the host university and country, pseudonyms they chose for themselves, and previous experiences abroad) are given in Table 3.

Table 3.*The background information of the participants for this study*

Participants (pseudonyms)	Gender	Age	Year of Study	The Host University and Country	Previous Experience(s) Abroad (if any)
Ece	Female	22	3	Keele University - England	She participated in a European Union project for one week in a European country.
Melek	Female	21	3	Keele University - England	She was born in Germany, and spent four years there before moving back to Turkey. She visits her relatives in Germany in almost every summer.
Nur	Female	21	3	Keele University - England	She has no experience abroad.

These participants who completed the whole application procedure were provided with an Erasmus grant. There are three groups of countries in terms of the Erasmus grant and each group receives a different amount of financial support. Erasmus students get 80% of this amount in advance and when they are in the host country. They get 20% of the grant once they become successful at completing at least 20 European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits at the host university. In the Table 4, it is shown that the participants of the present study are promised with around 500 € per each Erasmus month. These participants are also advised to take ideally 30 ECTS credits per semester. In order to be able to get 20% of the grant upon return, they have to pass at least 20 ECTS credits. If they fail to pass these credits, they may be asked to refund the grant.

Table 4.*2014-2015 Erasmus student mobility grants in Euros (Obtained from ICO)*

Countries	Amount of grant (monthly)
Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom (UK)	500 €
Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Luxemburg, The Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain	400 €
Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Macedonia	300 €

During the preparation process, these students were responsible for obtaining their passport and applying for visa. They were also expected to arrange accommodation, plane tickets, and everything else needed for living in a different country. They only received help from ICO in terms of learning agreement and useful documents. It was, therefore, up to the participants' responsibility to collect information about the host country and university, and to get in touch with people from the host context. Lastly, participating in the Erasmus program does not mean that they are transferred to the host university, so they can participate in the program for a maximum of 12-month period. Students must return to their home university at the end of the Erasmus period and complete their program at the home university. The participants of the present study planned to spend only fall semester at Keele University for approximately four months.

In order to have a detailed understanding of the participants and their experiences, a brief introduction to their department may be helpful. The department being explored is considered as one of the most prestigious foreign language education departments in Turkey since it accepts the students with highest scores from student selection

examination. The department claims that they provide their students with a solid foundation in the English language, English literature, methodology, educational sciences, and linguistics in order to prepare them to work in every type of institutions offering to teach English. To be more precise, it is assured that the graduates of the department can teach at all levels from primary through tertiary. A considerable number of graduates teach at preparatory schools of state and private universities. Furthermore, plenty of graduates pursue M.A. and Ph.D. degrees upon graduation. However, undergraduate students are mainly prepared for English language teaching though they are provided with the knowledge of diverse subjects and different job opportunities.

3.4 Data Collection Tools

Since this study adopted an interpretative phenomenological inquiry method (Smith, 1996a), data collection tools and procedure followed the path depicted by this methodology. IPA is double hermeneutic since it, first, sees the experiences through the eyes of the participants, then the researcher interprets these descriptions through his own world. It is also in a close relationship with symbolic interactionism with a concern of understanding how individuals construct meaning through their social and personal world. IPA, in essence, recognizes the dynamic connections among cognitive, linguistic, affective, and physical being; therefore, it contains a complexity in its understanding of the world, and it acknowledges the struggle that individuals have when they disclose themselves (Smith & Osborn, 2007). The role of the researcher, thus, is key to interpret these revealed meanings.

Before starting to interpret the meanings ascribed by the participants to a particular phenomenon, the researcher is supposed to conduct in-depth phenomenological interviewing protocols in order to co-construct the meanings attached to lived experiences (Seidman, 2006); in this regard, interviews are seen as effective mediators to establish a rapport between a researcher and a participant (Creswell, 2012). However, in order to have a deeper access to their inner worlds or their lived experiences, the researcher may need to put an extra effort to reveal them through probing and prompts (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Detailed explanations for the type of

interviews and other data collection tools adopted in this study are given in the upcoming sections.

3.4.1 Phenomenological Semi-structured Interviews

First of all, semi-structured interviews are compatible with phenomenology since they are thought to be appropriate for digging into people's experiences around a specific phenomenon (Willig, 2008). This type of interviews usually utilizes open-ended questions with a focus on the research aims of a study (King & Horrocks, 2010). The questions prompt participants to reconstruct their experiences around the foci of the study. (Smith & Osborn, 2007). The advantages of using semi-structured interviewing in phenomenology are rapport/empathy facilitator, more flexibility and room for digging into emerging issues, and possibility of richer data, so it can be an appropriate tool for detailed exploration of personal experiences (Smith, 1996b; Smith & Osborn, 2007).

Seidman (2006) puts forward that three in-depth qualitative interviews should be conducted in a phenomenological study. He believes that the collected data would present more trustworthiness if the interviews are conducted several times and in a systematic and purposeful way. The first interview, according to him, encourages the participants to tell about themselves and their experiences around the phenomenon up to the present time, so it has a more *past* focus in itself. In the second interview, the interviewer concentrates on the details of the lived experience with a more emphasis on *present*. Lastly, in the third one, participants are asked to reflect on the meaning of their lived experiences including the issues in the previous interviews. This last interview can also include *future* perspectives around the phenomenon so that the researcher can deeply understand the meanings attributed to the phenomenon since past, present, and future are interrelated around a lived experience. Although participants make meaning of their experiences during all the interviews, it is the last one during which participants reflect on the lived experiences in a deeper and broader way. Additionally, up to that last interview, a rapport is possibly established between the researcher and the participants.

Marshall and Rossman (2011) suggest that an interviewer should have a good level of listening, personal interaction, question framing and elaboration skills so that he can reveal the meanings attached to the phenomena. Moreover, an IPA researcher should possess “open-mindedness; flexibility; patience; empathy; and the willingness to enter into, and respond to, the participant’s world” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 55). If participants do not feel secure in opening up the issues to the interviewer, then there is not much meaning in conducting phenomenological interviews. In order to achieve this, self-disclosure, self-presentation (e.g., what you wear, non-verbal communication, the kind of language you use), appropriate dress and setting, introducing the project in detail, assuring about the privacy can be helpful in establishing rapport with the participants (King & Horrocks, 2010) since they may feel under stress when they are exposed to an interview guide and recording (Willig, 2008).

The power or status relationship with participants may also intervene in interview, so the researcher should actually try to provide a relaxing environment, less jargon and simple language (King & Horrocks, 2010). The interviewer is human with many experiences, so it is also possible for interviewers to share their own experiences with the participants because an in-depth phenomenological interview is not a mechanic one. However, researchers are advised not to overuse their own experiences (Seidman, 2006). The most important thing, above all, is to show a genuine interest in their stories (Seidman, 2006); otherwise, participants may not feel close and ready enough to share the details.

With respect to the questions directed to the participants, the questions are shaped around *what* and *how* questions in phenomenological interviewing in order to let participants reconstruct their experiences and meanings nested in them (Seidman, 2006). Seidman (2006) suggests keeping interview questions short accompanied by a small number of open-ended questions. Moreover, he strongly advises to ask participants to elaborate on emerging points with illustrations or stories. Smith and Osborn (2007) also strongly suggest using probes and prompts during interviews especially when participants are expected to expand on an issue or to clarify a point.

However, the researcher should be careful about not leading the participant while probing and prompting (King & Horrocks, 2010). Following and adopting all these key points and suggestions made for phenomenological interviewing, three interview guides were conducted in this study. The researcher had the questions beforehand though they were semi-structured (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). More detailed explanations related to the structure, function, and content of the interviews used in this study are provided in the next section.

3.4.2 Interview Schedules for This Study

Seidman's (2006) in-depth phenomenological interviewing, which is highly influenced by Alfred Schutz (1967), shaped the construction of the guides for this study. Inspired by Seidman's (2006) phenomenological interviewing and taking Smith et al.'s (2009) suggestions into account, in-depth semi-structured interviewing was adopted as the main data collection tool while other tools were used for triangulation purposes. The interviewing schedule for this study was designed in three stages in line with the research questions (Appendix A); however, some modifications were made to the Seidman's steps. In the first guide, there was more emphasis on the past experiences but it also included a number of meaning making questions for the present time. This first one also aimed establishing rapport. In the second one, the emphasis was more on the present meaning making but with a future orientation since participants were asked to reflect on their imagined experiences and foreseen experiences based on their past and present experiences. The last one is more focused on the final feelings before departure and on their reflection on whole preparation period. Overall these three interviews attempted to reveal the dimensions and meaning making of the phenomenon that was shaped within past, present, and future.

The questions were prepared by the researcher in line with the research aims and questions of the study; however, these questions did not aim to dictate but started with general questions to dig in the personal experiences as they were being told by the participants. Thus, it showed a phenomenological endeavor to understand subjective experiences in all their details. All the interviews were, in that regard,

flexible and open; thus, the researcher mainly adopted the role of prompter and listener. The participants were also assured that there was no right and wrong answer, and all their answers would be relevant and interesting to the researcher. You can find the focus areas and purposes of the interview protocols in the Table 5 given below, and it is recommended to have a detailed look at the interview questions given in the appendices.

Table 5.

The focus areas and purposes of the interview guides for this study

Interviews	Focus Areas	Purpose
Interview 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal background (socioeconomic, educational, language) • Decision-making process • Choice of host country and university • Initial and fresh feelings toward the Erasmus program • Initial feelings toward living in a foreign culture and educational system 	The main focus of this protocol is the past experiences. It aims to explore the complex decision-making process of Erasmus candidates and to elicit their fresh and initial feelings toward the exchange program. With the help of this first protocol, establishing rapport between the researcher and the participants is also aimed.
Interview 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plans, motivations, expectations, and concerns toward the international experience • Anticipation of possible gains for their ongoing language teacher education process • Knowledge and perception of the target culture, society, and host university 	The main focus of this protocol is on the present meaning making of the future experiences. Based on their past and present experiences, they are prompted to reflect on how they position the effects of the program on their future life and career.

Table (cont'd)		
Interview 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elaboration on imagined experiences and imagined communities 	
Interview 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaning-making of whole preparation period prior to their international experience • Reflections on the emerged issues from previous interviews • Final feelings and emotions before the departure 	This last interview which took place prior to their departure focuses on final feelings and thoughts before they leave the country. They also reflect on whole preparation period.

Incorporating special techniques to phenomenological interviewing is also appealing because it is not easy to go beyond the superficiality of the phenomenon (King & Horrocks, 2010). Imaginative variation technique can be used to clarify essential features of an experience or phenomenon. Accordingly, the researcher asked the participants to imagine their choice to study abroad and what would happen in case of not choosing it in order to reveal the distinctiveness of the chosen path. They were also asked to imagine some variations of their interactions in the target culture to explore the ramifications of their planned actions and reactions to the (un)anticipated cases. Imaginative variation technique was, therefore, sometimes used as a prompt. For the first and third interview of this study, *Salmon Line* technique, which was developed by Phil Salmon and offered by King and Horrocks (2010) was also used. This technique offers a line with bipolar constructs written at either end of the lines on which participants are required to put the elements they were asked to. In this study, participants were asked to mark a point between *ready to live in the target society* and *not ready to live in the target society* on a line. They marked the same

line both in the first and last interview; in this way, the researcher aimed to probe for a summary of their preparation period.

All the interviews were conducted face-to-face and in participants' native language which was Turkish. The spacing between first and second interview was two or three weeks, but the last one took place two or three months after the second interview and prior to their departure. All of them were encouraged to share their experiences whenever they wanted or they were kindly asked on the way to share if they had any. After each interview, the researcher transcribed and read them to both have an in-depth understanding of participants' accounts and prepare next interview protocol in line with the emerging points. The Table 6 below shows the details of the interview guides for each participant.

Table 6.
The details of the interviews for each participant

Interviewee	Interviews	Date	Duration
Ece	1 st interview	27.04.2015	50 minutes
	2 nd interview	04.05.2015	66 minutes
	3 rd interview	07.08.2015	95 minutes
Melek	1 st interview	22.04.2015	32 minutes
	2 nd interview	13.05.2015	63 minutes
	3 rd interview	06.08.2015	64 minutes
Nur	1 st interview	29.04.2015	34 minutes
	2 nd interview	07.05.2015	53 minutes
	3 rd interview	10.08.2015	85 minutes

3.4.3 Interview Setting

The place where an interview is to be conducted makes a difference. This context should be somewhere familiar and comfortable to the interviewee (Smith 1996b; Smith & Osborn, 2007). The setting should also meet these criteria: comfort, privacy, and quietness (King & Horrocks, 2010). Public spaces can also be preferred due to their relaxing, comfortable, and neutral features; however, hearing each other and recording the interview clearly are concerns in public spaces (King & Horrocks, 2010). Following these suggestions, interviews for this study were conducted in a room at the department where participants study, so the place was familiar to them.

The comfort was also ensured through the selection of a comfortable, private, and quite room. Participants' opinions were also collected regarding the setting of the interviews before each protocol so that they could feel ready and relaxed to share and reflect on their experiences.

3.4.4 Piloting Interviews

Each interview guide for this study was piloted before conducting them since Smith (1996b) believes it may be useful to pilot interviewing with a colleague or someone who would be interested in being interviewed in the aimed research field. For piloting purposes, another Erasmus candidate who was selected to study in Germany was chosen. She was a good choice for piloting because she was also taking a preparation for the Erasmus program at the same time with the other participants. The researcher reflected on the appropriateness of questions and techniques both during and after the piloting sessions and he made necessary changes or modifications following each piloting. She was also asked for her opinions about the protocols, and her suggestions were also taken into account while revising the protocols. Besides piloting the protocols, external opinions were collected from four experts concerning both the structure and the function of the interview questions. These four experts were the advisor to this study, a professor in the linguistics field, and two other colleagues who had knowledge and practice of qualitative research. The final form of the protocols was created after the piloting and collecting expert opinions.

3.4.5 Data Collection for Imagined Experiences and Communities

In addition to in-depth interviews, Creswell (2012) encourages researchers to develop innovative or creative data collection methods which may attract interest of readers and participants; in that regard, qualitative researchers are usually encouraged to use alternative writing means such as the use of diaries in order to understand the lived experiences (Smith, 1996b; Willig, 2008). Data are, therefore, not limited to the interviews in this qualitative study (Biggerstaff & Thompson,

2008). In this study, a text-based technique and an online instant messaging tool (i.e., WhatsApp) were also used.

For collecting data for participants' imagined communities and experiences, the researcher presented two options to the participants:

1. He would provide participants with a notepad on which they were supposed to describe their imagined one week experience in the target community with three levels: university or academic life, life in the social communities, individual time or life. This notepad would be provided by the researcher at the end of the first interview protocol with detailed instructions. (See Appendix B for instructions). They were expected to hand in this notepad before the second interview protocol so that the researcher and the participant could discuss on the points that emerged from this notepad.
2. He would ask them to record the same time period with same levels in the imagined community with a voice recording device. He would also suggest that they could take notepads with them and they were free to draw whatever they wanted on these notepads.

All of them chose the first option and provided approximately 2500 words in total describing their imagined experiences that were structured around the three levels. On those notepads provided to them, they were free to write and draw whatever they wanted in terms of the target culture, society, educational system, and their free and individual time. With the help of these imagined experiences, a depth was provided to their motivations, expectations, predicted challenges, and concerns. Since they brought the notepads a few days before the second interview protocol, it was also possible to discuss and reflect on the issues that emerged from these notepads, so this type of data collection added depth to the second interview.

On the other hand, the researcher aimed to spend time with all participants as much as possible. Creating an online group on a social media platform such as on Facebook was suggested but they had already chosen to communicate with each other via an online instant messaging tool (i.e., WhatsApp) before the researcher

contacted them. Following their consent for the researcher's participation in their messaging group, the researcher kept logs of the interactions that took place on that mobile platform. In this online group the researcher adopted both participant as observer and observer as participant roles (Angrosino, 2007) because sometimes he was expected to answer their questions as a previous beneficiary of the program, and in other times when they interacted with each other, he protected his silence to observe the patterns of sharing and communication among the participants. All the interactions that took place on the online group provided approximately 10.000 words as data; however, the researcher did not code but read them many times to triangulate the findings. This type of observation also helped the researcher to track the preparation period in a more informal environment and establish rapport with the participants. Overall it was possible to observe the whole period as they used this environment for group communication.

3.5 Data Analysis

Phenomenologists could be reluctant to rely on specific methods too much because they tend to criticize strict approaches applied by natural sciences (Hycner, 1985). This concern is also voiced among IPA researchers both due to its newly established steps and flexibility in exploring phenomena (Smith et al., 2009). IPA is indeed based on the interpretation of text and interviews (King & Horrocks, 2010). During the interpretation, the researcher makes sense of the meaning shared by the participant who also has made sense of his/her world, so it is double hermeneutic. While analyzing the data, it takes both *emic* (insider's meanings) and *etic* (outsider's/researcher's analyses) perspectives into consideration due to this double hermeneutic nature. Besides the double hermeneutic approach, IPA highly values idiographic investigation of each case before underlining convergences and divergences among lived experiences under broad themes. Thus, a researcher preserves loyalty to each unique case rather than rushing to analyze other cases; in this way, IPA assumes that the detailed descriptions of individual experiences reflect essences and bring the researcher closer to the *essence*. It should, therefore, be

possible in an IPA study to hear both particularities and convergent and divergent points under shared themes.

Data analysis follows an inductive and iterative path, so, for an IPA analyst, it is natural to move back and forth through different ways of thinking about the data. Regarding its inductive approach, it uses flexible techniques and ignores hypotheses and the influence of theoretical positions; at the same time, it does not depend on pre-existing codes or schemas (Braun & Clarke, 2008), but, as stated, it employs an inductive and iterative thematic style of analysis. However, it recognizes the value of theoretical understandings both during and after the detailed individual and cross-case analyses (Smith et al., 2009). Indeed, it is useful to have theory-driven questions for an IPA study but they come to play as *secondary* because they can only be answered at a more interpretative stage (Smith et al., 2009), so they could be brought to last stages of data analysis or to the discussion of the findings. For the initial phases of data analysis the researcher is expected to rely on the research questions or the aims of the study.

Taking these phenomenological underpinnings into account, IPA offers a number of iterative steps for data analysis (Smith et al., 2009):

Step 1: Reading and re-reading

After completing the transcription of recorded interviews for each participant, the researcher reads them a number of times until a comprehensive understanding of each case is achieved.

Step 2: Initial noting

The transcripts can be printed out, and on the left-hand margin the researcher jots down the significant points about the participants' utterances. On the right-hand side margin, the researcher takes notes of emerging themes about the participant. All the points made by the participant is treated as equally important. These two margins are indeed in a close relationship on the way to developing capturing themes for each participant.

Step 3: Developing emergent themes

The emergent themes are listed on a separate page and the researcher looks for connections in order to cluster them under broader themes.

Step 4: Searching for connections across emergent themes

The researcher creates master themes covering the themes from the previous stage.

Step 5: Moving to the next case

The researcher applies the same procedure given in the previous steps to all cases.

Step 6: Looking for patterns across cases

The researcher creates a final list of master lists which are obtained from each case. As a final step, the researcher puts an effort in clustering this final list of themes as *superordinate themes* which cover convergences and divergences. These synthesized themes bring the research to the essence of the experience as closest as possible. As the next step involves writing-up and elaborating on these superordinate themes, the researcher is expected to provide quotations from the coded segments, so he is advised to assign key words in order to retrieve them during the write-up.

Of course, all the steps above involve the interpretations of the researcher and the conceptual framework of the study to some extent (Smith, 1996b), so the final analytic story can be deepened through arguments from the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2008). Another important point that bears utmost importance is the reflexivity of the researcher throughout the analysis procedure, which is discussed in detail in the upcoming relevant section titled as *researcher's role*. It is also possible to drop some emergent themes because of their failure to fit in the overall structure as Braun and Clarke (2008) put forward as follows: “[a] theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set.” (p. 82).

3.5.1 The Analysis Steps Followed in This Study

Since this study applied the methodological practice of IPA, it remained faithful to the steps given by key IPA scholars. However, a qualitative data analysis (QDA) software, MAXQDA 12, is used in this study for qualitative analysis. Since the researcher transcribed approximately 10 hours of interviews and added other qualitative materials to the data pool, a need for organizing and analyzing them in a systematic environment emerged. Thus, the software was not used as a result of its technological charm but due to its convenient support of data analysis method chosen for this study (Gibbs, 2014). Gibbs indeed sees usage of a QDA software as a good support for IPA:

Without question, given the central role of coding in most programs, analytic approaches using this, including grounded theory, framework analysis, thematic analysis, IPA, template analysis and qualitative content analysis, are served best by the software. In general, approaches to analysis that are concerned with the development of themes and with analyzing data across cases are well supported by the software's functions. (Gibbs, 2014, p. 289).

The researcher was also aware of the fact that the software did not analyze data but helped researcher to do it in an organized manner, so it is the human analyst who keeps his/her research focus and theoretical frameworks in mind, and keeps data and analysis organized around them with the help of the software (Gibbs, 2014). Another advantage of using the software was to maintain transparency since it helped the researcher to have a good track of the analysis, code lists, and emerged themes. The software, MAXQDA 12, was particularly helpful in organizing a range of qualitative materials which were transferred to digital formats for the compatibility with the software. The main data collection tool for this study was semi-structured interviews, and it was accompanied by the text-based descriptions of imagined experiences, and online instant messaging logs. During the analysis of the interviews and text-based narrations, the software helped the researcher to code them, construct code lists, retrieve coded segments, write memos, search texts, and create maps for connections between codes or themes, so it was highly beneficial for defining and explaining thematic categories (Kuckartz, 2014).

Since key scholars adopting IPA advise researchers to be innovative, flexible, and reflexive as long as they abide by the phenomenological understanding of the research procedure (Smith et al., 2009), this study did not see any danger in using a QDA for data analysis. The researcher also modified the data analysis steps in order to be in rapport with the software because the original steps in IPA were developed for a pencil and paper analysis type, so, for example, creating margins for data was not possible. Instead, the software enabled the researcher to both do initial coding and keep a record of emerging ideas and interpretations through creation of memos.

As the usage of software in data analysis has been explained, here the data analysis process that this study followed is given:

First of all, the researcher transcribed all the recorded interviews on a computer and he transferred all other supporting data to compatible digital formats in order to be able to analyze them with MAXQDA 12. While transcribing, the researcher did not pay particular attention to prosodic aspects of the interviews since IPA mainly aims to interpret the meanings shared by the participants. Transcripts, therefore, only included some notes, non-verbal utterances such as laughter and significant pauses. The next step required the *initial coding* of each case. The understanding of coding in this study is as follows: “[c]oding is not a precise science; it’s primarily an interpretive act” (Saldana, 2009, p. 4). The coding of data followed the *cycles* described by Saldana (2009). He offers two cycles of coding: *First Cycle* methods are the ones which are deployed during the initial coding of data. *Second Cycle* methods are the ones which require such analytic skills as reorganizing and reanalyzing before reaching a final list of themes or superordinate themes. During this cycle one can recode some segments or remove some codes which seemed relevant at first, so basically this stage of analysis reorganizes the initial codes and attempts to end up with broader categories. These first and second cycles correspond to the IPA data analysis process which includes initial coding, conceptual coding, and theme formation or formation of superordinate themes.

Since *quality* and *complexity* is prioritized in qualitative studies, more than one coding type can be used in a study to enhance and deepen the findings (Saldana,

2009), so there could be flexibility in using coding types. This flexibility actually depends on the theoretical framework, research focus, and methodological practice of a study. There is also no best way to code data and it is normal to use more than one type of coding according to Saldana (2009). Thus, in this IPA study, it was aimed to mix usage of codes whenever it was relevant. To be more specific, this study combined *descriptive* (i.e., the basic topic of a statement or a passage), *process* (i.e., gerunds grasping the narrative actions articulated by the participants), *in-vivo* (i.e., the terms used by participants themselves), *values* (i.e., participants' values, attitudes, and beliefs representing their perspectives or worldviews), and *emotions* (i.e., labeling emotions expressed by the participants) coding types. These codes are appropriate for phenomenological studies since the aim at using these codes is to reveal and describe the meanings attached to the lived experiences by particular participants. They are also relevant for digging into participants' perspectives and worldviews. While coding, the researcher constantly reminded himself of research concern, theoretical framework, research questions, and goals of the study to keep himself focused on coding decisions (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Kuckartz, 2014). All these coding types that were selected for the aims of this study also worked well with the software as it was promised by Saldana (2009).

For the second cycle of coding, this study utilized *pattern* (i.e., explanatory codes for an emergent theme) and *focused* coding (i.e., thematic similarity among the most frequent and significant initial codes) to grasp the connections among codes and come up with emergent themes, which is given as conceptual coding in an IPA study. During and after coding cycles, the emerging issues were mapped showing the networks and connections among codes, memos and emergent patterns, and this process helped the researcher to form final superordinate themes. Memos were particularly helpful both before and during the formation of themes as Saldana (2009) puts forward:

The purpose of analytic memo writing is to document and reflect on: your coding process and code choices; how the process of inquiry is taking shape; and the emergent patterns, categories and subcategories, themes, and concepts in your data – all possibly leading toward theory (p. 32).

In the case of this study, *theory* can be replaced with the word *essence*. Although only the researcher coded all the data, the emerging categories during all these coding processes were supervised by thesis advisor. Codes and master themes that emerged from the participants' reports are provided at the end of this study (Appendix C). Following first and second cycle coding of the first case (i.e., Ece's case description), in an emerging and evolving way, a number of broad thematic categories was established for the first case; then, while coding the second case, the researcher realized the similarity of codes and emerging similar patterns, so decided to cluster them under the same thematic categories even if the codes under them showed slight differences for each participant due to the complexity of human experiences. These established themes in each case summary also eased the formation of superordinate themes. The final superordinate themes, however, not only reflected the commonality but also consisted of differences (Saldana, 2009; Smith et al., 2009).

As IPA is an idiographic practice, each step involved the analysis of each unique case before moving to the next participant's transcript. After each case was completed, then convergences and divergences were sought for. During all these analysis procedures, each participant was treated with equal respect. Therefore, the final themes reflected the experiences and thought patterns of all candidates. As all the interviews were conducted in Turkish, the researcher also needed to translate the selected quotes into English.

After completing theme formation phases, the researcher deployed interpretative/hermeneutic endeavors to bring a depth to the emerged themes in line with the theoretical foundations and research questions of the study. Researcher also examined instant messaging interactions and the imagined experiences iteratively to enhance the description and interpretation of the experiences. He read each of them several times, and benefited from memos. After synthesizing memos, he integrated them to the existing themes to deepen and triangulate the findings. He also checked the findings in a comparative fashion with the existing literature on international education. Therefore, while reporting the findings, the researcher chose, first, to

report each case summaries of candidates for England; then, he shared the superordinate themes covering the experiences of all the participants; in this way, reports respected the idiographic experiences of Erasmus candidates who were selected for England.

The analysis steps that were followed in this study are summarized and illustrated below:

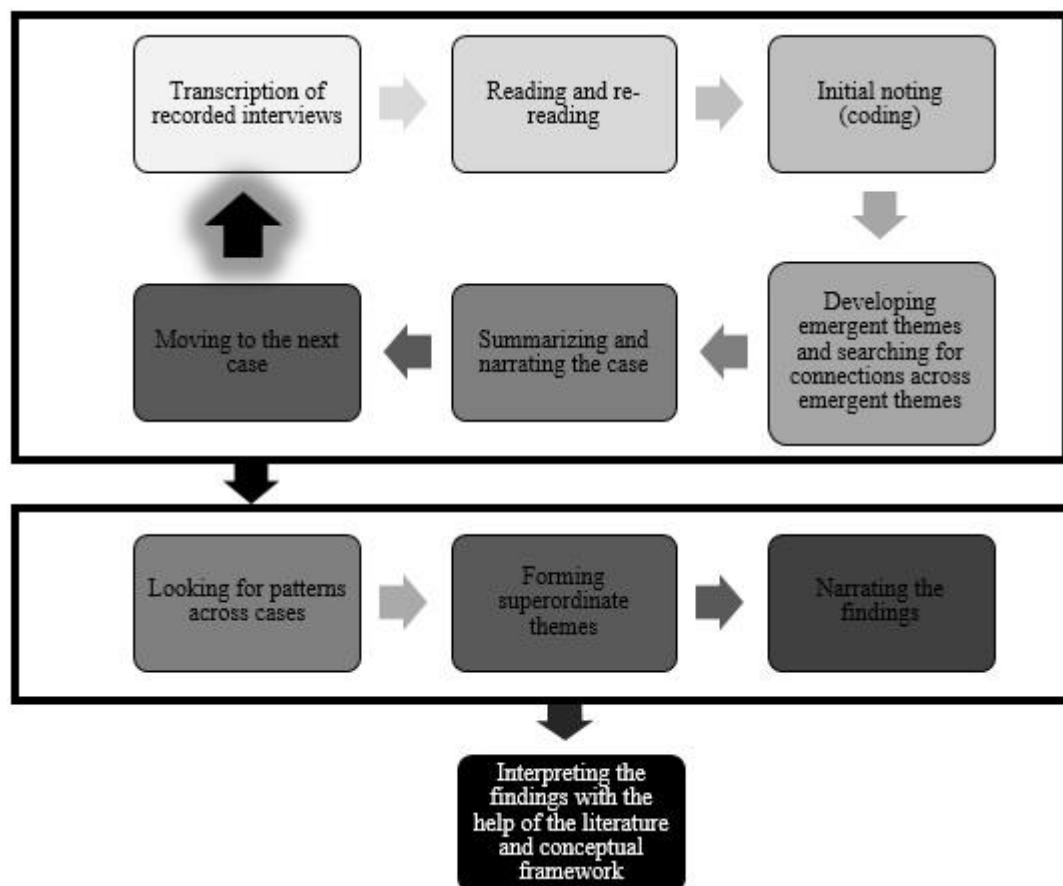


Figure 2. Data analysis process.

3.6 Validity Issues

The term validity in both quantitative and qualitative research refers to the inferences drawn from data (Creswell & Miller, 2000). However, the *quality* concern of the qualitative research does not permit findings to be generalizable to larger populations due to its relatively small number of participants and sometimes purposefully selected settings; nevertheless, the phenomenological findings may tell much about

human beings even through a single unique individual because the findings may resonate with other people in similar contexts (Hycner, 1985). The reader, therefore, should evaluate a qualitative phenomenological study in terms of theoretical transferability rather than empirical generalizability; in this way, the reader establishes a connection between the analysis in the study and their own personal and professional experience (Smith et al., 2009). The methodological practice of this study, IPA, claims to have a rigorous data analysis process which is built upon transparency of research process and is open to the investigation of the reader (Smith et al., 2009). An IPA or phenomenological study, therefore, should try to ensure transparency through carefully describing sampling, data collection, and data analysis procedures in all details (Hycner, 1985). Based on the transparency, implications of this IPA study may be transferable to other contexts but the findings of this study may not be generalizable to other populations and settings.

Besides ensuring theoretical transferability and transparency, qualitative researchers may adopt different types of lenses to increase the credibility and validity of a study. The key lenses include the lens of the researcher, the participants, and individuals external to the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This study benefited from all these three lenses to validate its findings. Within the lens of the researcher, *triangulation of data* (i.e., multiple and different sources of information collected from and for participants), *disconfirming evidence* (i.e., looking for disconfirming and inconsistent evidence after establishing themes), *researcher reflexivity* through a reflexive journal (i.e., setting aside the researcher's assumptions, beliefs and biases) were deployed to increase validity of the findings. As for the lens of the participants, the validity procedures of *member checking* (i.e., consulting to the participants regarding the data they provided and interpretations made upon them) was used (Hycner, 1985; Saldana, 2009). Finally, regarding the external audit to this study, the *audit trail* (i.e., examination of the research procedure and findings by external readers or experts), and *peer debriefing* (i.e., review of data by peers or colleagues who are familiar with the research) were put to use. Apart from these three lenses, some other procedures

were also at play such as *thick description* of setting, the participants and the themes, and *collaboration* with the participants throughout the research.

While sharing the findings and quoting from the participants, the researcher also attempted to provide unique details or identifiers to the participants and avoided anecdotalism in which researchers select extracts that favor their interpretations (Barbour, 2014; Kuckartz, 2014):

So a good IPA study will always have a considerable number of verbatim extracts from the participants' material to support the argument being made, thus giving participants a voice in the project and allowing the reader to check the interpretations being made. (Smith et al., 2009, p. 180).

The findings can also be checked against the relevant literature which helps the researcher to orient the study and increase its validity (Ahern, 1999; Hycner, 1985; Smith et al., 2009), so the researcher in this study made exhaustive literature search both before and after data analysis and discussed them in every relevant section. Of course, while following all these validity procedures, the aim was not to stay loyal to the checklists of natural sciences (Barbour, 2001); rather, the study aimed to reduce the suspicion which may potentially arise among readers and other researchers. Lastly, there might be some arguments against the usefulness of phenomenological research, so some benefits of phenomenological research could be (a) more sensitivity toward the phenomenon and the experiences shaped around it; thus, people involved in similar cases of the phenomenon may benefit from the study; (b) improvement of some theories and offering some new variables to be tested; (c) revision of the phenomenon-related policies (Polkinghorne, 1989).

3.7 Ethical Issues

The study was conducted under the approval of Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects (Appendix D), and written consent was taken from all the participants prior to the procedure. In the consent form, the procedure for data collection, purpose of the study, and potential benefits were described in detail. The participants were informed that the study would cause no physical or emotional discomfort, and confidentiality of the interview and their personal information would

be ensured. In the end, they were given an option for not participating in the study, but they were asked to sign consent form if they would like to participate. One copy of consent form was given to the participants. After the last interview, participants were given a debriefing form which informed them about the study in further details.

3.8 Bracketing in Phenomenological Research

In a phenomenological study the researcher is expected to immerse enough in the world of the people who experience the phenomenon to analyze them in a credible way (Dowling, 2007; Eberle, 2014; King & Horrocks, 2010; Moustakas, 1994). However, one may not be aware of one's all preconceptions related to the study and the participants at hand, so reflective practices involving bracketing personal experiences and assumptions are required (Smith et al., 2009). As a way of increasing trustworthiness of phenomenological data analysis, bracketing along with the other validation techniques mentioned in the *validity issues* must be ensured; otherwise, readers would have a right to question the method in terms of the phenomenological reduction. This state of reflexivity is seen as a necessity prior to, during, and after data collection and analysis. The researcher is also expected to keep a reflective journal in order to set aside his own previous experiences and assumptions or theoretical constructions that are related to the scope and aims of the study (Smith et al., 2009). Bracketing is, in this sense, important for readers to see and perceive the researcher's background and viewpoints for the study. However, the ability to set aside personal preconceptions during data analysis procedure is more about being reflexive than being objective since human conduct always bears elements of subjectivity and it is sometimes impossible to put aside some personal issues because we are simply not aware of them; "the process of bracketing is, therefore, an iterative, reflexive journey." (Ahern, 1999, p. 408). In terms of being reflexive for a phenomenological study, these following key points are important to be considered:

- feelings before, during, and after data collection;
- the points the researcher knows he is subjective about (Ahern, 1999).

3.8.1 Role of the Researcher in This Study

I recognize that my previous experiences and assumptions regarding the Erasmus exchange program may interfere with my interpretations of participants' experiences; therefore, I need to ensure the bracketing of my previous experiences, biases, and preconceptions related to short-term international exchange programs before I describe the participants' experiences. Indeed, I always reminded myself throughout the research progress to separate my own personal experiences from the data presented by the participants. Despite all efforts, I admit this qualitative research is context-dependent and influenced by my interpretations. However, I always revised possible interference of my personal experiences along the way in order not to influence participants' ideas. I also kept a reflective journal during data analysis which also helped me to see the potential influence of my international experiences on data analysis. The journal indeed implies the efforts invested in purifying the data. Moreover, member checking, rapport, and collaboration with the participants allowed me to create a democratic environment in which everyone involved in the research co-constructed the meanings, so the findings did not reflect only my interpretations.

Regarding my personal experiences related to the aims and the focus of this study, I had two different short-term international experiences funded by the European Commission. First one was the Erasmus exchange program within which I studied in the Netherlands for five months as an undergraduate exchange student. In the second one, I was a Comenius language assistant in a Polish primary school for six months. While studying in my second year at an English language teacher education program in Turkey, I felt an urge to gain an international experience as a prospective English language teacher. My main motivations while applying for the Erasmus program were to discover new cultures, practice English, and open up new career opportunities. The application and preparation process was full of uncertainty and concerns, but it was also an exciting period for me. Despite all the excessive paperwork and insufficient official support, we, as a team of four Erasmus candidates

for the Netherlands, managed to complete all the necessities and started to wait for the departure day without any intercultural or language preparation.

Following our flight, there were a number of problems waiting for us in the target country. When we landed in the Amsterdam Schiphol airport, there was not even a place for us to stay; only a host student was there to help us survive, but we somehow managed to settle down after a long time of struggle. However, there was still something unexpected: I had difficulties with intercultural communication both due to my ethnocentric views of cultures and low English speaking skills, so I struggled with the integration into the target society and even to the communities of international students. Most of the crucial aims and goals prior to the sojourn seemed not achievable at that time due to the closed and withdrawn characteristics of our Turkish group, adaptation problems like accommodation, culture shock, and uncertainty of a new academic environment. We also had financial problems due to the low amount of the grant and our own limited budget. Despite all of these hindering experiences, toward the end of the sojourn, I managed to gain some intercultural and professional skills as a result of the courses and basic interactions with international students and local people.

After completing the Erasmus program, I desired to have further international experiences to explore a different European culture and educational system, so I decided to apply for Comenius language assistantship program during my last year of undergraduate studies. Thankfully, I was provided with a grant to work as an English language assistant at a Polish primary school. This time I was better prepared and more experienced in terms of living in a different country and culture; therefore, I took more initiatives to engage in local culture(s). In fact, I was the only Turkish person in a small Polish city, which enabled me to immerse in the target culture and make new Polish friends. As a result, this experience helped me to grow personally and professionally as a foreign language teacher.

Together these two experiences were life-changing for me since I was exposed to different realities from my own culture and I had a chance to experience being *the other*, so I had a chance to view cultures from both inside and outside. I also had a

chance to explore different educational systems. After all, I felt these experiences had changed me radically, helped me to improve my English skills, and I was aware of intercultural issues more than ever. In an indirect way, I wanted to follow an academic career in language teaching with a more focus on intercultural issues. After my experiences abroad, I felt biased toward positive impacts of study abroad. I believe every language teacher candidate should be provided with an opportunity to participate in an international program. However, those who choose to study abroad may not have a second chance to compensate the previous one and maximize the experiences; therefore, preparing and supervising study abroad candidates are important. Thus, in this study, I take an initiative to explore the experiences of Erasmus candidates and thought patterns so that people in charge can take necessary steps to increase benefits of study abroad programs.

Lastly, in terms of the researcher-researched relationship, I work as a research assistant at the department where the participants study as undergraduate students. Thus, I occasionally underscored my role as a researcher not as a department staff which might have posed some power issues, and I tried to establish a rapport with them through informing them about the details of the study, my own international experiences, and some social gatherings. I also participated in their online messaging group where they shared their questions, experiences, and problems related to their preparation process. They sometimes asked me questions about critical issues during their preparation and I did my best to help them. In other times, I was a silent observer of their online interactions.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

4.0 Presentation

As IPA is an idiographic practice, each step involved an analysis of each unique case before moving to the next participant's transcript. After each case was completed, convergences and divergences were sought for among the cases. During all these analysis procedures, each participant was treated with equal respect. Therefore, the final superordinate themes reflected the experiences and thought patterns of all candidates. After completing superordinate theme formation phases, the researcher deployed interpretative/hermeneutic endeavors to bring a depth to the emerged themes in line with the theoretical foundations and research questions of the study.

While reporting the findings, the researcher chose, first, to report each *case summary* of the participants; then, he shared the *superordinate themes* which cover divergences and convergences among participants' experiences and thought patterns; in this way, reports respected both the idiographic and common experiences of Erasmus candidates who were selected for England. Each case summary was elaborated under thematic headings. Each case, therefore, first started with a background information; and then, each participant's decision-making process, formal and informal preparation, (inter)cultural dynamics, future-oriented thought patterns were elaborated. Under superordinate themes, these themes were discussed on a deeper level and the researcher applied an interpretative lens to convergent and divergent issues among the participants. Thus, first, the unique experiences of the participants were elaborated, and then convergent and divergent points were sought for all candidates under the superordinate themes just as it is pointed out by key IPA scholars:

In the former (phenomenological, insider) position, the researcher begins by hearing people's stories, and prioritises the participants' world view at the core

of the account. In the latter (interpretative, outsider) position, the researcher attempts to make sense of the participants' experiences and concerns, and to illuminate them in a way that answers a particular research question. (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005, p. 22)

4.1 Case Summaries

4.1.1 Ece's Case Description

4.1.1.1 Participant Profile

“I am not a person who takes the initiative”

Ece is a 22-year-old prospective teacher studying at an English language teaching department in Turkey. She was selected as an Erasmus candidate for Keele University in England and her exchange period was arranged for the fall semester in 2015-2016. Ece is also thought to be a successful language teacher candidate at her department based on her high CGPA. Her native language is Turkish and she gave her English proficiency level as advanced. She also took some compulsory undergraduate courses for German language, and she thought that she was still a beginner level learner in German. At the time of the interviews, she was also learning Russian and planning to maintain learning it in England, too.

Ece graduated from high school at the top of her class and decided to pursue a career in English language teaching. She believed that she had a passion toward English, and she acknowledged the benefit of studying at a private primary school where learning English was prioritized. Ece also had an international experience when she was a last year student at high school. She stayed in Slovakia and Hungary for 10 days in total for a project funded by the European Commission to raise global awareness among European youth. She believed that this experience abroad helped her to refresh her interest in languages and move forward to become a “world citizen”. For example, she now puts some efforts in learning Russian because she developed an interest toward Slavic languages after visiting Slovakia and Hungary. Although she felt more as a “world citizen”, she still found her roots in Turkish culture:

I am on my way to become a world citizen. I cannot say I have reached that level but I make a slow progress toward it. Of course I don't leave my Turkish identity behind and I definitely follow some Turkish cultural routines; I know I don't have control over this; however, I question things more now. (Ece, 2nd Interview)

Her experiences up to that point including learning languages and the experiences abroad helped her to expand her worldview, and she seemed to be on the way for having an ethnorelative view of cultures. She was also aware of the fact that her core culture was embedded in her daily life and she could not escape it, but she seemed to feel that the ultimate reality was not the culture she lived in; that's why, she questioned some values inherent in her root culture. Her views of the religion and Turkish culture were not static but dynamic, and she was in a state of questioning inherent values both in nations and religions, so she said "I don't feel any belonging to the things that has a label". She defined herself also as withdrawn, introvert, and not a person who takes the initiative. She saw her withdrawn characteristic as part of her personality and even implied it in her imagined experiences in England as an Erasmus exchange student:

I imagine there [England] as a boring place to be. When I first go there, I will go outside and will say "yeah, this is the campus, similar to my home university..."¹ I won't be able to approach people and say "hi, how are you?", I think I will get bored. I may talk to people who tend to be more social and outgoing if we have some common activities together. I think I need to be more social to make most of it. (Ece, 3rd interview)

When asked to find some more adjectives for herself, she described herself as a dreamer, organized, open-minded, and perfectionist. However, she viewed being perfectionist as the most salient aspect of her personality. Following Ece's brief personal history and characteristics, her decision-making, preparation process, and imagined experiences (e.g., thought patterns such as plans, concerns, motives, expectations) for the Erasmus program are explored in the upcoming sections.

¹ Ellipses here and in upcoming quotations show some part of a quotation has been omitted, so they do not show pauses.

4.1.1.2 Decision-making Process

“I need support before making a decision”

Ece reported that she always had a keen interest on international experiences but she complained about not having sufficient self-confidence and initiative for long-term experiences. However, she had been interested in the Erasmus program since she first heard it at high school. She was in fact confused during the application for the Erasmus program. She did not want to apply for the program because of some bad memories told by some of her friends who lived abroad within the Erasmus program and were similar to her in terms of personality characteristics. She also thought that Erasmus was only fun and would not be worth to prolong graduation; however, with the strong push by her close friends, family, and boyfriend, she started to think about the options, but still was hesitated due to the risk of a new experience which was totally foreign to her. She mentioned that she was not aware of the value of the program and she treated it as a waste of time:

I totally gave up the idea of Erasmus and would not do it in my last year. Since I am perfectionist, I should preserve the order and routine in my life. I also had a high CGPA and it was a good sign for my career. I did not want to prolong graduation due to the Erasmus program. Therefore, I gave up the idea. (Ece, 1st Interview)

However, after a while, she wanted to put her CGPA to use, and she faced strong support by people who were close to her. Indeed, she said she had not had a key role in her decision-making process but other people had more. She thought that her friends encouraged him not to waste her CGPA because it was the key determiner while selecting students for the Erasmus program. Her family also saw this opportunity as beneficial to her career and as a once in a lifetime opportunity. Finally, it was her boyfriend who made her realize that England was the best option for her career in English language teaching field; otherwise she did not consider it as an option:

While applying for the program, I wanted to study at University of Konstanz from Germany. I was with my roommate and it was almost midnight. I called my boyfriend and told him about my choice.... I told him that I ordered my choices as Germany and Spain because I knew that there was a teaching

practice opportunity at those universities. He asked about other options. I said I had England among the options. He asked why I hadn't selected Keele University. I told him England was an expensive and cold country where I couldn't live.... However, he said that I studied English language teaching and it would be meaningless to study in other countries.... I agreed with him and Keele was my first choice. Then I thought why I didn't consider it as an option since I was a pre-service English language teacher, and the chances of studying in England would not be too high in my life. (Ece, 1st Interview)

First, she valued the existence of a student teaching component in her choices because such an experience would help her to be exempted from the *school experience* course at her home university, and this would ease her graduation on time. However, her father also supported England choice due to the same points as her boyfriend made; therefore, she made her final decision on the England option. Nevertheless, she still was not sure whether to participate in the program or not, even on the day of announcement:

We had one of our classes when they announced the results. Everyone who was selected became so happy that the instructor had to stop lecturing and congratulated those people who were selected, but I felt nothing and even felt bad because people were so happy for me and hugging me although I had no feelings in me.... There I started to realize that the Erasmus experience was something valuable.... (Ece, 1st Interview)

After the announcement of results, she faced with the decision whether to participate in the program or not, so she started to take many aspects into account. First, she searched for other candidates to eliminate the risk of being alone. Since she expressed that she had a withdrawn personality, she needed some friends in order not to bear the experience all alone. Second, she struggled with the decision for which semester to study. She did not make it until she met other candidates at the meeting. She felt quite relieved and made her final decisions when she met Nur and Melek at the meeting:

I felt quite relieved. All three of us would be 4th year students during the Erasmus period. All three of us would start their experience in the fall semester. All three of us would go to the same country and university. I also thought we were similar in terms of personality.... I went to the meeting with no decision in mind, but there I said to myself that I would do this. I wouldn't be able to do it alone. (Ece, 1st Interview)

She in fact thought spring semester would be better for her because she would combine it with summer period and would travel many destinations. She would even consider prolonging graduation in this case, but she couldn't face up to the risk of being alone. Thus, she chose to study at Keele University for fall semester as the other *similar* peers did. The main reason for choosing fall semester for all of them was in fact the desire to graduate on time thanks to the courses they would take in England during fall semester. Her family, who was influential on her decision, also favored the fall semester choice since she noted that prolonging graduation would be a financial burden for her family even though they were willing to finance her throughout the Erasmus program.

Regarding her decision-making process, it was clear that she went through a dynamic process. Due to her personality, she wanted to be backed up by the support of other close people. She also did not want to do it alone, so she looked for other peers to have a group supporting each other. Furthermore, she needed to consider the credit recognition, graduation on time, and financial issues while making final decisions. After all, she was happy with her final decisions. Now that she made the decisions, a period of preparation was ahead of her before she began her Erasmus experience.

4.1.1.3 Formal Preparation

“I feel tense with formal processes”

After resolving all the issues around decision-making, Ece and her peers, Nur and Melek, had to handle a series of formal procedures before their Erasmus period started. They had almost five months to complete all the formal procedures which involved paperwork including passport, visa, accommodation, leave of absence, and learning agreement between universities. Ece in fact felt stressed during all this period of formal preparation: “I feel stressed out when I am under pressure of completing some formal procedures; that's why, I warned everyone around me to tolerate my improper actions... I want to resolve everything in a very short time.”

Since she also defined herself as perfectionist, she sometimes felt uneasy because things were beyond her control. She lost the sense of control over the process as they

had to wait for other people to approve their documents and tell them what to do next. The main struggle was with the learning agreement document that she had to complete for credit recognition upon her return to Turkey. On this form she was expected to list courses that she was going to take at the host university and their equivalences at the home university. This form was important to her because this would indirectly determine the date for her graduation, so she needed to make it sure that the courses she would take at Keele University would be recognized by her home university. However, she complained how people disappointed her regarding the course selection and assurance for credit recognition:

They don't recommend courses to us and ask us to find the courses. I understand that this is not their responsibility but they leave us in the lurch. As we are novice in such formal procedures, we truly need their help.... When we ask for the information about the learning agreement and credit recognition for previous exchange students, they seem reluctant to help us. This is, however, so important for us that our graduation depends on it. One course means prolonging one semester.... (Ece, 1st Interview)

She indeed had this course dilemma with the *reflective teaching* course because she hoped this course would be replaced with the *school experience* course at the home university; as a result, she would graduate on time. Otherwise, she would have to prolong graduation for one more semester. This uncertainty of learning agreement procedure made her feel tense and concerned about her graduation. She also was not so sure about the courses that she selected among the courses offered by the host university as she thought there was not enough information about the content and instruction of the courses. Therefore, she said “we listen to our heart while choosing them”, and felt threatened by the possibility of late graduation.

As she coped with several documents and formal processes, she had to communicate with different people who were expected to help or support them. In almost all of the interactions with officials, she sensed a lack of empathy and clarity. She thought they did not understand how novice she and her peers were and how they were struggling with the process. The following quotation reflected her unhappiness with people who were expected to understand and help her:

This is the only thing I have understood so far from this process and this is the same for every office we visited: as if people were dealing with subatomic particles at the time we were visiting them, and we were asking them to bring us a glass of water. They all looked angry with us. I will never understand this. It looked to me as if I was asking for something extra or odd. This makes me feel bad and I really get angry with these people. (Ece, 3rd Interview)

Although she was not happy with the amount of the information and help at the home context, she appreciated the efforts on the side of Keele University in terms of arranging accommodation and matching them with host students to ease their arrival. She felt relieved after being informed about the pick up from the airport and the arrangement of a dorm for her stay. They would arrive there on September 22, 2015, and they were promised with some welcoming services, which helped them to overcome their anxiety related to first arrival in a foreign country; therefore, Ece and her peers showed a positive attitude toward the sensitivity of the host university toward their needs. Keele University also created a Facebook page in order to answer candidates' questions in an informal environment where the candidates also had a chance to know each other before their period started. However, she realized that their concerns were too different from other international students as Turkish participants focused more on formal issues such as accommodation or money transfer whilst other candidates asked questions aiming to create a socialization environment.

Since England also imposed strict visa procedures on Turkish citizens, Ece felt inferior to other European candidates who did not need to go through strict visa procedures. As a result, Ece felt as a "second class human being" and hesitated for all her actions and this compounded her withdrawn characteristic. Another reason for the hesitations could be her relatively low English language skills and the existence of native speakers in the intended environment. Overall, while coping with the formal procedures, Ece felt stressed all the time due to the lack of empathy and clarity; that's why, she wished for more capable supervisors and a more systematic procedure in which everything was clear. As her main concern was graduating on time, she needed clear information about the courses she would take and whether these courses would be recognized or not. Although she thought she did not have a

pleasant formal preparation, she was happy with the attitude and help by the host university thanks to the arranged accommodation and welcoming services. However, she could not escape the feeling of “second class human being” due to the strict visa conditions. There is no doubt that these formal procedures formed only one part of her preparation experiences, so there was also an informal part of it.

4.1.1.4 Informal Preparation

“I don’t know how to prepare for Erasmus”

Besides coping with the paperwork in order to be accepted as an official Erasmus student, Ece was also aware of the fact that she would live in a different country with a different culture; therefore, she thought she might need some informal preparations to live in that foreign environment. However, she did not know exactly what to do almost one month before her departure: “I am not ready to live in England.... I know I need to do a lot of things during this limited time but I don’t know how... Perhaps I will work on my English, but I don’t know how to.” As the departure time was approaching, she found herself in chaos, and most importantly she did not know what to do exactly for language and cultural preparation even though she had made some plans for improving her familiarity to the British accent through watching TV series or academic videos such as lectures or documentaries.

She also knew she had to improve her English skills for her Erasmus period, but she could not allocate sufficient time for personal preparation since she had a busy semester; she also attended summer school following the spring semester to pass two more courses. Her main concern obviously was to graduate on time, so she did not prioritize a cultural or language preparation for Erasmus. Even if she had such a plan for that kind of preparation, she agreed that she had to deal mostly with the official paperwork, so from her point of view, there was no time for cultural and language preparation. In fact, there was no one around officially to help her with a preparation for a foreign environment. Under such a circumstance, she started to feel negative toward her upcoming experience, which might have occurred due to the uncertainty and unpreparedness concerning her upcoming experience:

Everybody keeps asking how I feel about Erasmus as I will be there on September 22; there is no much time left. I wish I had more time. I have started to think that I will miss my family and friends. I have started to think about negative things. There are many obstacles waiting for me, let's not say obstacles, but my mind is full of negative issues, so I can't think positive aspects of the experience and feel relieved. (Ece, 3rd Interview)

It is clear that uncertainty of a new environment and unanticipated adaptation process were disturbing for her; furthermore, she was concerned about leaving a familiar one behind. However, every action by the host university worked perfect for her to feel more positive. Having her accommodation arranged and being promised with a welcoming service, she at least felt better for her first arrival. Even some little initiatives from the host university were enough to relieve her. For instance, they received an e-mail from the host university informing them about an international day following their arrival, and they were asked to bring their local biscuits and sweets. She really liked the idea and felt better about the host university. While reflecting on this mail, she stated that "I wish we had more mails like this because I think we really need it instead of having official things all the time". She obviously felt tired with an official procedure, so such cultural events as *international day* were welcomed by her and was found relaxing.

In fact, the host university was, to some extent, aware of their concerns related to living in a new environment. They received e-mails from Keele University frequently prior to their departure. The e-mails informed them about the time left before living there and about how to survive in the campus. To Ece, these mails were "alerting" them for the upcoming experience and keeping them on track. Thus, these "little things" meant a lot for Ece as she really needed such initiatives to go out of the stressful aspects of an upcoming foreign experience.

Another relieving point for Ece was to have the other two peers during all these formal and informal preparation. Although she was aware that they could separate their ways when they arrived in England for the sake of meeting other people and having different experiences, she truly appreciated having them by her while preparing for the experience:

Having the other people who share the same concerns as me is relieving.... Even for the issue of credit recognition and graduation we share the same concerns. We understand each other. It is not about having someone around when we go there, but it is more related to having people with the same concerns. So I don't ask them not to leave me when we go there. It is possible to have isolated lives there, so we don't know what is waiting for us in England. At least for these preparation processes, it is nice to have them. (Ece, 1st Interview)

The quotation above in fact was taken from the first interview, so the process had not started yet for them. After completing all the formal processes, she did not change her mind about her peers and stated that:

We bunched up and helped each other throughout the process. Indeed, the similar characteristics of us helped me to feel warm toward them because we are all under the same conditions. They all will be last year students next year, we go there together, we have similar concerns, and we have similar mindsets. (Ece, 3rd Interview)

Another interesting point in her preparation experiences was to have a contact also with an exchange student who was already in England studying at Keele University from her own home university. She considered her a trustable and informative source for both formal preparation and the life in Keele. Having this person during the preparation period truly eased the preparation process for Ece; thus, she felt lucky to have her. Her informal preparation was actually shaped around negativity and uncertainty, but she felt relieved and more ready with the help of the actions taken by the host university and this Turkish Erasmus student who was already at the host university. Besides, she was glad to have other two peers by her throughout her both formal and informal preparation period. She also felt a strong need for language and culture preparation, but again, she did not develop appropriate ways to prepare for the target culture and language. Indeed she had negative feelings prior to her departure possibly due to the unpreparedness and the threat of a new and foreign environment. Thus, she seemed to have needed a well-planned and supervised language and cultural preparation with the help of the both institutions.

4.1.1.5 (Inter)cultural Dynamics

“I don’t know much about British culture”

Since her informal preparation involved also her cultural concerns, an elaboration on her cultural understandings was needed. As she had already questioned the inherent and taken-for-granted values in cultures or religions, she tended to define herself as a “world citizen”. In the past, she actually avoided questioning the values intentionally as she felt discomfort. However, after exploring some different cultures, she started to look at cultures from a more relative perspective. With this relative mindset toward cultures, she described *culture* concept as: “I think everything falls under culture; I can’t limit it. I also think the things such as lifestyle, thinking ways, worldviews, and daily routines reflect much about culture.”

Although she started to view cultures from a deeper perspective, she admitted that she did not have much knowledge about British culture. She also thought that she chose to study in England to enrich her future profession and current teacher education program. However, she started to search for some cultural information about England before she lived there. When asked to tell what she knew about British culture, understandably she shared some of her stereotypes with the researcher:

What do I know? I don’t know much. It is a cold country. I know they are cold people until they know you.... I think their cuisine will not appeal to my taste, but these are all product of my imagination. I imagine that when I go to a café, they’ll serve me, but I won’t like what they have served, and will pay much at the end. (Ece, 2nd Interview)

However, she knew that all these cultural views of her were based on stereotyped images of the culture. Again, when asked about the social life and routines in England, she gave “tea” as the answer. She also added that British people were punctual and organized. Following these answers, she stated that she based her opinions on the TV series that she had watched, but knew these views were stereotyped. Leaving her stereotyped understandings aside, she also had rational opinions about the life in England:

I don't imagine them as too modern. The university won't be a place for elite. It will be a place for university students. The university is located nearby a small town; it could even be a village. I guess I won't have any difficulty in adaptation and integration as we will at least be university students. (Ece, 2nd Interview)

Even though she reduced the complexity of culture to the size of a city or town and to the label of "student", she had more realistic ideas this time because she did not have either too exaggerated or stereotyped image of the life in England. At least she knew that people would have more realistic lives than depicted in TV series. However, as she did not have any contact from British society with whom she could communicate frequently, she indeed had to trust websites, TV series, movies, and books; thus, stereotyped images were sometimes unavoidable. As her main reference point for cultures was Turkish culture, she tended to compare new cultural information or practices with Turkish culture or her own life in Turkey. However, she thought that Turkish culture was not open to innovations compared to European countries. She also complained that "we are too much dependent on other people for our decisions". This last idea on *Turkish collectivism* drew the researcher's attention because she was the one who made her Erasmus decision under the influence of other people. Moreover, she believed Turkish people had too many stereotyped opinions toward other cultures or minorities living in Turkey.

Trusting her previous international experiences, ethnorelative cultural mindset, English knowledge, open-mindedness, and interest in new cultures and languages, she felt confident with the integration into the target culture. However, she tended to underestimate the importance of intercultural encounters and might prioritize language skills over cultural skills. For instance, they were offered an intercultural communication course at the host university; however, she did not seem willing to take that course; she was more eager for a course intended for improving pronunciation skills in English. This choice might imply the underestimated value of intercultural communication or competence for their upcoming international experience, so a certain claim and prediction for her active participation was still not possible although she claimed to have an ethnorelative mindset. Her withdrawn

personality and English communication skills should also be taken into account while considering her future participation in the target culture.

However, in the case of a rejection by the host culture or society, and failure in integration, she said:

I will get very upset. I will because I overthink the things.... I will think why this happened to me; I am also a university student; I am not too far away from their culture; I don't wear a chador; I am just like them. They could also have stereotypes; it is not only us Turkish people who have stereotypes, but I will be sad upon a rejection. (Ece, 2nd Interview)

This quotation above showed how she was concerned with having participation in the target culture or about loneliness in England. She was also aware that she could face some stereotyped questions about her own culture, so she was planning to use “sarcasm” as a strategy to cope with such questions directed at her. Besides being sarcastic, she was also aware of her key role in introducing her culture, so she said “we create our own images there [abroad]; sources like media, internet could be limited.” Therefore, she aimed to break down the stereotypes when she faced them. However, she added that:

I don't see this as a mission assigned to me, but I know I may influence other people. There are stereotyped opinions about everything. I also have some even if I am not aware of them. My family didn't impose any on me, but like it or not, I have some prejudices toward homosexuality or toward other religions as a result of being exposed to TV, education, and media in this country. I try to get over them but I wish I had realized them earlier. (Ece, 2nd Interview)

It was clear that she did not have ethnocentric views of different cultures and even shared the things she had prejudices for. Thus, she was not planning to advertise Turkish culture and act like an ambassador but to destroy the stereotypes. Ece was full of promises and premises for cultural integration in England even if she underestimated the complexity of intercultural communication. Moreover, she had some concerns about her withdrawn personality and fluency in speaking English. So, upcoming parts discuss her deeper thought patterns around her motives, expectations, plans, and concerns.

4.1.1.6 Future-oriented Thought Patterns

4.1.1.6.1 Motivations

“My motivation is not to explore night club culture”

Ece had always planned to apply for the Erasmus program since she heard it for the first time at high school. The idea of exploring a different culture and educational setting had been an exciting prospect for her. She finally gained that opportunity to study in England for four months, and she believed this four months period should not be underestimated although she knew the duration was not the only factor that made the Erasmus program valuable, so she stated: “I will have grant; I will have a place to stay; I will study there; and all of this will take place in England.” The choice of England was particularly valuable for her because of her motivation to improve her English skills and cultural knowledge for British culture as part of her ongoing teacher education.

Ece also recognized the value of the Erasmus program in terms of the opportunities to develop life or personal skills. She believed that she did not have good survival skills and had a high motivation to improve them with the help of the Erasmus program:

One of the reasons for choosing to study abroad within the Erasmus program is to improve my survival skills. I think I am not good at surviving on my own. I want to improve those skills necessary for survival. At least when I return to Turkey, I might say that I did it. This might also relieve me psychologically. For the other international experiences in the future, this experience might help me, too. (Ece, 1st Interview)

Ece’s another motivation was the opportunity to speak English all the time. She felt thrilled with the idea of using English in her daily life. However, she thought her speaking skills were not at a satisfactory level for her to have an effective communication with native speakers. If she could achieve to communicate intensely in English throughout her exchange period, she believed she would make a significant improvement in terms of her listening and speaking skills in English. It was, therefore, a good opportunity for her to improve what she thought she was weak at in terms of using English.

As Ece was one of the successful students at her own department in Turkey, she wished to maintain her success at a basic level during her Erasmus period, so she underscored the opportunities for professional and academic development more. She, therefore, thought she did not support the popular image of the Erasmus program since, according to her, most people and even most candidates at her department viewed it as an opportunity for having fun in a different country. She added that she was not going there to explore night clubs, but for exploring a new culture and improve as a future English language teacher.

She also thought that the Erasmus program would enhance her future language teaching career. First of all, she thought she would recommend international programs to her future students and give examples from her own first-hand experiences. Ece, therefore, thought she might increase their motivation and awareness with the help of her experiences in the British culture. It could be inferred from her statements that the Erasmus program had a positive image in her mind. Second, she believed she would improve her English skills and this would legitimate her position as a “good English language teacher”. Moreover, she was motivated to develop her acquaintance with the British accent and to explore the differences between British and American accents. This awareness toward accents, according to her, might help her to “raise awareness” among her future students toward different varieties of English, too. Overall she thought she would make a difference among her colleagues who had never been in an English-speaking country. This would also indirectly enhance her CV.

Another interesting point about her motives was related to the history of England. At first, she affirmed that she was not interested in the culture and history of England but had only familiarity with them through British TV series. However, after being selected as a candidate for England, she started to develop some sympathy and interest toward issues involving British culture. Some news started to catch her attention or she watched movies about *Queen Elizabeth*, then decided to learn more about British history.

In general, regarding her upcoming Erasmus experience, Ece was motivated by the opportunities to improve her English skills, increase her cultural knowledge and understanding of the British culture, improve her survival skills, and explore a new educational system. She was also motivated to use her experiences as an English language teacher and to help her future students with their language learning. She also held some expectations in order to pursue her goals in England. The next section focuses on her expectations.

4.1.1.6.2 Expectations

“This experience must be worth to prolong graduation”

Since Ece took the risk of prolonging her undergraduate studies at the home university, she thought the experience must have been worth it. She, therefore, expected to have good memories and to meet her expectations. Otherwise, she said “I can’t prolong graduation just to have fun and to see a new country. As my father told me, I can travel by myself in the future”. She, therefore, expected some concrete outcomes. This experience obviously must be an added value on her CV, but, for at least that moment, she might not have realized the implicit outcomes promised by a short-term study abroad experience or she was aware of them, but the contextual dynamics forced her to prioritize some over the others.

Ece also expected to meet some locals but she did not think there would be too many opportunities to do so since she believed she would spend most of her time with students at the campus; that’s why, she viewed pubs, supermarkets, bookstores as the potential socialization places with locals, but these were the places that she expected to visit less frequently. She expected those people she would meet in England to have empathy skills for her “naiveté”. Since she anticipated that she would have a series of problems concerning adaptation to the university and campus life, she did not want to be left alone: “I do not expect a special treatment, but I don’t also want to be treated as a regular student. I don’t want them to leave me on my own; I may ask them to tolerate me sometimes”, so she had a strong desire for help from the host university or host society during her first days or weeks in England.

She also knew that in order to get sufficient help and support from the target society, they needed to be open-minded; that's why, she expected not to see a racist society. However, she still was concerned about racism or prejudices toward her:

I don't want to live in a racist society because I know they will discriminate against me. Since I go there from a so called Muslim country, they may discriminate against me if they have racist intentions; therefore, I expect to see a society of open-minded and tolerating people. (Ece, 2nd Interview)

According to her, if they met the criterion for being open-minded, they would accept her. However, she did not trust her social skills. She thought that she might spend her time alone in her dorm room. As a remedy to her loneliness, she reserved some hope for classroom environment. Since she also socialized with her classmates at the home university through classroom environment, she expected to maintain the same socialization habit there. As she also thought they would have some holiday and travel opportunities, she hoped to make new friends during these travel times, thereby increasing possibilities of intercultural communication which may pave the way for the improvement of intercultural communicative competence.

Overall her main expectations for the Erasmus program were related to the attitude of the target society toward her. She expected local people to have empathy and respect toward her situation and background. At the same time, she expected to socialize through classroom environment and trips within the UK. Her motivations and expectations could in fact be better understood after delving into her plans and concerns that are discussed in the upcoming two sections.

4.1.1.6.3 Plans

“I don't have utopian plans like acquiring the British accent”

Ece's plans were not only intended for her upcoming Erasmus experience, but she had also some plans for her preparation time in Turkey prior to the experience. She, therefore, had to find ways to prepare for the experience on her own due to the lack of a preparation program for them. From time to time, she realized that she needed to improve her language and cultural knowledge for her upcoming international experience, so she developed some action plans to improve her self-perceived weak

sides before the experience started. However, she was unable to realize most of them due to excessive formal preparation, lack of time and systematic guidance.

Since she was concerned about her language skills, she planned to improve at least her listening skills prior to the experience. She particularly wanted to improve her familiarity to the British accent; otherwise, she believed she might have some problems related to understanding daily conversations with her classmates or other local people. For this purpose of improving listening skills, she thought British TV series would be of significant help even though they did not reflect the academic genre for which she also desired to improve her familiarity. She also had the intention of learning British history in order to be able to interpret their daily life and current events in an accurate way. Moreover, she planned to join in the daily conversations held by local people around current events, so, in order to maintain such a politic or historical conversation, she knew that she had to possess some knowledge of their political system and historical developments:

I will explore their history because it seems very interesting to me that they are ruled by both monarchy and parliamentary system. This political system may help me to understand their daily life; that's why, I would like to have some knowledge about these political and historical issues before going there.... We also talk a lot about our history during our daily lives even without being aware of it. We talk about Ottomans and how we have been changed since the foundation of the Republic. They must also have such talks during their daily lives, so I will learn their history. (Ece, 2nd Interview)

As for her plans for the Erasmus experience, she tended to make realistic plans. First of all, she did not plan to acquire a British accent because she knew that it was not possible to acquire it in such a short time period; instead, she wanted to focus more on learning the specific aspects of the British accent such as word choices or stresses. In her imagined experiences, she interestingly pointed out the accent differences among international students; therefore, she seemed to be planning to observe and analyze the status of English as a *lingua franca* as well with the help of international students who would use English to communicate. The motivation behind this plan was to help her future students who might struggle with accent differences or with

the varieties of English. She, therefore, showed her strong motivation to become an English language teacher and wanted to invest in her future profession.

Her another realistic plan or goal was to pass the courses she would take at Keele University, but the interesting point was that she and her peers deliberately chose “easy” and “appropriate” courses. They wanted to take “easy” ones because they did not want to spend their Erasmus period dealing with hard courses, and they had an access to that type of information through Turkish Erasmus students who were already there. With the adjective “appropriate” they meant the courses for which they could ask recognition at the home university. In their situation, there are clearly many factors involving in setting goals and developing some plans to realize them.

As she did not want to spend her whole time on courses even if she wanted to focus more on professional development, she made plans related to travelling. She planned to visit countries bordering England and wanted to see as many as possible.

However, she regarded her *withdrawn* and *introvert* personality as a potential barrier to her travel plans and socialization, so she planned to overcome it through breaking her chains and taking the initiatives. If she could overcome her withdrawn side, she planned to meet many new people from different countries and to break down her prejudices toward different cultures and nations.

As life was a long run for Ece, her future plans after the Erasmus experience were also explored. In that regard, she perceived English language teaching as a lifetime career and considered applying to a master’s degree program in the same field. In general terms, Ece planned to learn history and politics of England, participate in local practices and conversations, pass her courses, improve her listening and speaking skills in English, become more outgoing, visit tourist destinations, meet people from different cultures, and become a successful English teacher in Turkey with an Erasmus experience on her CV. Now that Ece’s plans concerning before, during, and after the Erasmus program are clear, her concerns regarding the Erasmus experience are elaborated in the next section. They are important because one can trace the potential reasons for a possible failure in realizing sojourn goals.

4.1.1.6.4 Concerns and Fears

“I may experience loneliness”

Ece mainly complained about her introvert and withdrawn personality and regarded it as a barrier to her effective communication and friendship with other people, so in line with her character and reflections, her main concern about the Erasmus experience was the possibility of suffering from loneliness. She believed that meeting other people in England would be difficult both due to her character and the lack of events organized by the host university:

The problem is that there is no student organization here in Keele uniting Erasmus students. For instance, one of my friends, who is an Erasmus student in Poland, told me that she attended the parties or events that were organized by Erasmus Student Network (ESN) every week. Unfortunately we don't have such big Erasmus parties or events here. I think we could make friends more easily during the first couple of weeks here with the help those parties. (Ece, Imagined Experiences)

Moreover, she had already an implicit acceptance of native-nonnative speaker hierarchy and viewed it as an obstacle for her integration, so she said:

I feel like there won't be many nonnative people, and I think international students tend to socialize among themselves; therefore, I think we won't have this socialization opportunity with other international students both due to the low number of them and due to the lack of an organization uniting us. In this case, we may hang out with each other as Turkish people. (Ece, 3rd Interview)

The quotation above implied the perceived difficulty of integrating into networks created by locals as she felt more confident at socializing with other international students. As they might go through the same adaptation stages with other exchange students, she might have felt closer to them due to this mutual experience. In any case, it was not difficult to sense the fear of speaking English with native speakers. This fear was clear when she complained about her low English speaking skills.

She was, on the other hand, concerned about the new educational setting in England. She naturally felt threatened with the new curriculum, instruction, and examination system. Her fear grew bigger when she imagined having classmates who were native speakers of English; this concern was indeed not surprising considering her self-

perceived low English speaking skills. Another interesting point related to her concerns about a new educational system was her opinions toward the communication with instructors at the host university. In her imagined experiences, she described them as “professional” and “distant” who were not much open to communication and they were so organized that they left no room for questions and thereby communication. This description might have been caused by her stereotyped opinions of British people as “organized” and by her stereotyped attitude toward the communication style of “cold” British people; in a sense, their “cold” side was compounded when the *professor* label was attached.

Another prevalent concern was the possibility of prolonging graduation because of a potential failure at credit recognition upon return to the home university. Therefore, she rightfully asked for a clearer process of credit recognition and assurance of what courses they could replace upon her return. As the currency of England was almost four times more valuable than Turkish lira, she also foresaw some financial problems, and believed that her family had the same concern since she had already spent significant amounts of money for visa, flight tickets, and some other formal procedures. This financial concern could actually be one of the reasons behind the rush to graduate on time because otherwise she would be a “burden” on her family in terms of financial issues.

All in all, Ece was concerned about her introvert and withdrawn character since she regarded it as a barrier to maximizing her experiences. She was also concerned about her low English speaking skills and had a subtle fear toward communication with native speakers; however, she hoped to improve her communication and speaking skills with some active participation which could help her to overcome her inhibiting character. Another concern was about the lack of an international student organization that might push them to have a lonely life there. Lastly, she was concerned about prolonging graduation, financial issues, and sharing a new academic setting with native speakers.

As a last point about Ece, *the Salmon Line* marked by her deserved a few words. The participants in this study were asked to mark a point between *ready to live in the*

target culture and *not ready to live in the target culture* on a line called Salmon Line. They marked the same line both in the first and last interview; in this way, the researcher aimed to reach a summary of the preparation period. In Ece's case, she marked a point closer to *ready* in her first interview, but in the last one she marked a point closer to *not ready*. When asked about this change, she noted that at the beginning everything seemed simple, but in time she came to understand the complexity and uncertainty of living in a different culture and leaving old habits behind. Moreover, in time, new concerns and fears came into the play with an excessive thinking of the upcoming experience, so she showed an opposite reaction by moving from ready to not ready. However, it should be noted that this change to not ready occurred a few weeks before her departure, so every concern was at peak during that time. In fact, these marks on the Salmon Line should be interpreted carefully after reading the entire case summary up to this point.

4.1.2 Melek's Case Description

4.1.2.1 Participant Profile

“The only word which describes me is nomadic”

Melek is a 21-year-old prospective teacher studying at an English language teaching department in Turkey. She was selected as an Erasmus candidate for Keele University in England and her exchange period was arranged for the fall semester in 2015-2016. As in the case of Ece, she is also considered as a successful language teacher candidate thanks to her high CGPA. Her native language is Turkish, and she regarded her English proficiency level as advanced.

Melek was born in Germany, and stayed there till the age of four before moving back to Turkey. At the time of the interviews, she still had connections in Germany and had some close relatives living there; for this reason, she visits them in Germany almost every summer. However, she did not think that she has native speaker proficiency in German because of the limited time spent there, so she viewed her German language proficiency as intermediate. Furthermore, she believed that she was good at understanding German but not able to speak it fluently.

While Melek and her mother were staying in Germany, her father had to serve in the military in Turkey; he indeed had to work at a dangerous region of Turkey where some terrorist movements were operating actively at that time; that's why, they could not come back to Turkey until her father completed his duty at that region. However, her mobility did not stop in Turkey due to her father's profession. When asked how she felt during all these changes, she expressed displeasure because she needed to adapt to different environments in short time periods. Throughout her educational history before her admission to the university, she attended six different schools, each in a different Turkish city. She, therefore, described herself as a "nomadic":

The only word which describes me is nomadic. I attended many different schools throughout my education life. I changed three schools even during my 4-year-long high school life.... It was too bad for me. I have no connection to my father's hometown. I was born in Germany. I stayed there for a while and then returned to Turkey. It is too complicated... (Melek, 1st Interview)

Having this mobility aspect in her life, she seemed confident with mobility and adaptation to different environments, thus being prone to risk-taking. Moreover, she had already a concept of *abroad* in her mind due to her connections in Germany. In that regard, she viewed her future Erasmus experience as another move following the others and as one of the "routine" mobilizations in her life:

As I said, I had to leave those places I got used to live in. We had to move all the time. Now, I feel like I need to move again for Erasmus and will stay there for a while before leaving there, too. I apply the same logic here as in my mobility history, but this time I have no family members with me. (Melek, 1st interview)

On the other hand, she thought that she was not brave and outgoing enough to take initiatives in her life when required, so she was indeed a bit worried about her first few weeks in England and about making new friends in an international environment. She relates those socialization and adaptation concerns to her self-proclaimed low English speaking skills. She, therefore, might have high life skills thanks to her mobility history, but her lack of fluency in English and self-reported withdrawn personality might put the maximization of her Erasmus experiences at risk.

Another alarming issue was her individualistic side. She claimed that she led an individual life after experiencing all these mobility issues, so she developed the idea that everything might be gone one day, and she would be left on her own. She indeed tried not to form any attachment to people because she thought she might not see them again after moving to another city. In her case, similarly to Ece's, a number of different individual factors including her identity issues and personal history are at play in terms of decision-making preparation for her upcoming Erasmus experience.

“I am a Turk, not German”

Although Melek stayed in Germany till the age of four, she did not feel any belonging to Germany, so it was a country to visit each summer and explore the attractions. She felt in the same way toward England or toward any other English-speaking countries although she spent a considerable time in learning and teaching English. Even she defined those people who felt close to British or American culture as “wannabe” and added that “I am Turk, why should I feel any belonging to those English-speaking cultures?” Although she had respect for different cultures and had developed empathy toward different life styles, she held some nationalistic thoughts. In that sense, she tended to prioritize what she called “Turkish values” and viewed the knowledge of English language as a skill to find a good job in Turkey and educate Turkish people.

As for her English learning history, she had also been a successful student similar to Ece. Although she hated English as a subject at the beginning because of some “incapable teachers”, then she started to like it thanks to her mother's encouragement. At high school she used to obtain the highest scores in English, so she had a reputation for her good English skills among her peers. She attributed that success to her own interest and her mother's encouragement. She still loved reading in English and was excited about being an English language teacher in the future, but she had developed no interest in cultures of English-speaking countries and only watched some popular TV series in English for which she noted that they were the products of popular culture and claimed that people consumed them even without questioning.

She had also no connection with people from different cultures or countries at the time of the interviews. The only connection to England for her was TV series and some popular news websites in English. She even told that she hated some social networking sites and found them as time wasting although there could be a chance for her to meet people from different countries. As for her Germany connections, she did not have any German friend although she was presented with opportunities to make friends there, so she put almost no effort in making international friends in real life or on online environments. In the past, at high school, she in fact had a pen pal friend from Canada, but she did not view it as a remarkable experience. From her perspective, they just had some simple interactions and exchanges, so she did not value the interactions much.

Regarding her religious identity, she viewed herself as Muslim, but the interesting point was her sentence following the statement of her belief system: “but I am an open-minded person”. She felt a need to highlight her open-mindedness with an example of her tolerating attitude toward atheist people. She, therefore, wanted to clarify her religious views by saying that she was open-minded and tolerating toward different religions. Overall she welcomed different cultures, ideas, religions, but she also chose to protect her core values including nationalistic and religious ideas. These points are clarified when discussing her cultural understandings where she stated that she preferred to observe cultures but not to participate in. Before elaborating on her cultural views and understandings, her decision-making and preparation journey toward studying at Keele University as an Erasmus exchange student are explored first.

4.1.2.2 Decision-making Process

“I make decisions for myself, but other people also have an impact on them.”

Similar to Ece's case, Melek also heard the Erasmus program at high school for the first time and had wanted to participate since then. When she started to study at her current department, she lost her interest in the Erasmus program, but still had it “somewhere in her mind”. Each year she missed the chance to apply for it until she

was a last year student, and it was her final chance. This final decision did not merely result from her desire to participate in the Erasmus program; rather, she thought that she had almost wasted her university life without doing anything “extra” or “worthy”:

I wanted to apply for a minor degree, but I didn't concentrate on it enough, so I didn't apply and missed the chance. When I was a first and second year student here, I used to only attend the courses, so I was not much interested in the courses or in anything else related to schooling. If I had not applied for the Erasmus program this year, I would have questioned my aims in life and would have felt too bad because I would have missed all the opportunities. (Melek, 1st interview)

Melek viewed the Erasmus program broadly as an opportunity to enhance her undergraduate studies because she did not want to obtain a simple degree. In an indirect sense, her main motivation to consider such international opportunities was to ease her job-seeking process when she graduated. However, those career-related motivations were not the only factor in her Erasmus decision. Her imagination of the future Erasmus experience presented some other motives, too:

Besides travelling experiences here, I think I have really improved myself professionally. This week I have realized so many pronunciation mistakes of mine that I felt really surprised. The courses I take here really help me to grow. I have also started to feel confident with my speaking skills because we always try to speak in English here. (Melek, Imagined Experiences)

She was clearly aware of her weaknesses in terms of her English language proficiency, and she regarded the Erasmus program as a valuable opportunity to improve her language skills. As a result of a potential improvement regarding her language skills, she believed her chances of having a good job would increase since job prospects were positively correlated with speaking skills in English from her perspective.

Her main motives for applying to the Erasmus program also influenced her destination choice. When the application period started, she, first, wanted to study in Germany because she would have many close people there to help her and indeed she maintained that she would feel confident and have comfort in Germany. However, she wanted to focus more on improving her English language skills, so she

chose to place Keele University as her first choice; nevertheless, she listed some German universities following her first choice, too. She, in a sense, looked for a safe harbor if she had not been selected for England. However, for the option of England, she was ready to bear all the difficulties and responsibilities of adapting to a new and foreign environment as she told that “I chose England because of English.” The main motive for her obviously was to improve her English skills.

Although she seemed motivated and decisive enough for her destination choice, she decided on the England option the night before the application period ended. She in fact changed her mind after talking to her aunt who lived in Germany:

My aunt works at a university in Germany; she sometimes helps me to find my way in life. She said she saw people who came to Germany as exchange students and learned German very well. She also told me to choose a country where English was spoken because I would become an English language teacher in the future and would have a chance to improve my English skills.
(Melek, 1st Interview)

Melek’s main motivation was clearly to improve her English skills when she decided to apply for the Erasmus program. After completing the application period, she had to wait for a month to learn the placement result. When the results were announced, she felt happy and rushed to inform her family and close friends, but the most important gain of that day was restoring her self-confidence. She perceived it as a giant step to develop herself professionally, so the expectations from the Erasmus program or particularly from a British university were high at the time of the announcement. She highlighted the final result as “changing my destination choice was a right decision”.

After having been selected to study at Keele University, she had to decide for which semester to start her exchange period. After reviewing different factors, she decided to start her Erasmus period in the fall semester. The main reason for that semester choice was to attend the graduation ceremony at her home university. She ascribed an important meaning to having the ceremony with her close friends with whom she had spent her undergraduate life, so she said “I would feel bad if I missed the

graduation ceremony. I would rather to have it with my close friends. Otherwise, I would have it next year with people I hardly know, so I didn't want to miss it."

In fact, she was not too concerned about prolonging graduation because she said she would not mind prolonging it for one semester as the Erasmus experience would worth it. She simply wanted to attend graduation ceremony with her close friends, so being present in Turkey at the time of the ceremony was the main concern; otherwise, prolonging official graduation date for one semester was not a big deal for her.

On the other hand, during the decision-making and selection process, she always felt supported by her family members and close friends. However, in contrast to what Ece experienced, Melek thought that she had control of her own decisions and was backed up by people around her, so she did not seek intentionally for approval and support of other significant people. She had the agency and control of her decision-making, but she did not deny the supportive role of other people and the key role of her aunt in her decision to study in England. In Melek's case, an implicit but the strongest motivation came from her deceased mother. She lost her mother in 2013. She always supported Melek's decisions and became a driving force behind her, so even after her demise, she stayed as a push for her actions:

My mother has always been a strong motivational source for me. Since my childhood, she has supported me in terms of learning English. I used to not like English. She was the first person who taught me English and made me like it.... She is my main motivation now. I feel good when I do things that she may like. (Melek, 1st Interview)

She thought her mother would be very happy to see her decision to study in England within the Erasmus program because she was the one who helped her to lay foundations of her language teaching career. She, therefore, wanted to elate her deceased mother with her successful career steps.

4.1.2.3 Formal Preparation

“To be honest, we don’t receive sufficient help”

After having been selected for Keele University and deciding on the Erasmus semester, Melek needed to complete a series of formal procedures before leaving Turkey. She had almost five months to complete all the formal procedures which involved paperwork including passport, visa, accommodation, leave of absence, and learning agreement between universities. Throughout all these formal procedures, she and her peers had to communicate with some officials in charge. However, she complained about the lack of help, support, and empathy toward them while completing the steps, so, to her, the process was stressful, ambiguous, and lacking supportive people. She, therefore, said “they just function on a basic level, nothing more or less”. Although she was supported by close people such as family members and close friends, she expected an official support from the institutions, too, but she felt disappointed in that regard.

The first step for her was to decide on the courses that she would take at Keele University; for that purpose, she needed some help to resolve ambiguities. When she and her peers were searching for some courses at Keele University, they did not know exactly the content of the courses and for which courses their credits would be recognized at their home university, so they needed help to make a final decision on the courses. However, both the coordinator from ICO and from her own department were reluctant to ease the process for them, so Melek said:

To be honest, Mrs. Suna [pseudonym, the coordinator at ICO] helps us, but her knowledge is limited for our case. She expects Mr. Kaya [pseudonym, the coordinator at her department] to help us with the course selection. He is supportive to some extent, but expects us to handle course selection by ourselves. (Melek, 1st Interview)

As these people in charge dealt with the problems of a number of Erasmus students who were preparing for different destinations, they might not be experts at every need of the candidates, so they sometimes might ask the candidates to take care of themselves. However, the problem was that they often did not show the possible

sources of solution but asked them to solve their problems on their own. In fact, this was exactly what Melek complained about:

I really need help while filling out all these documents. Sometimes I do not know what I need to write exactly because this is the first time I deal with such documents. Naturally I ask questions. However, when they seem reluctant to help, I question why they act like that. (Melek, 2nd Interview)

She simply complained about the lack of sufficient empathy toward their needs. She, therefore, summarized her help-seeking process as “everyone in this country works on a basic level”. As for the visa procedures, Melek hold similar opinions for the gap between expected and actual help from the officials. She similarly complained about the lack of clear information about what documents were needed exactly, and sometimes they needed to recollect some documents due to the “uncertainty” of the process. The real barrier was the visa itself because Melek did not buy her flight tickets before her visa application was finalized, so, in a sense, she ascribed an important meaning to the visa collection before feeling ready to live in England.

Similar to Ece, Melek also mentioned the benefit of having an online group created by the host university. However, as Ece also complained about, they used that page only for official purposes such as dorm application, account number for money transfer, and so forth. Although she did not elaborate on the help provided by the host university, she did not complain about it either. As for obtaining necessary information about the formal aspects of their international experience, Melek valued the role of Ceren who was already there and willing to help them with formal issues.

Overall she complained about the abundance of the paperwork and the lack of official support that she had expected to receive. She also expected more empathy toward their preparation because they simply were naïve in formal and even in informal procedures. However, the existence of her peers and Ceren eased the process for her. Lastly, she wished not to grapple with a tough visa process. Since her preparation was not limited to only formal procedures, her informal preparation is reported in the next section.

4.1.2.4 Informal Preparation

“What can I exactly do for my preparation to live in England?”

As well as completing some formal processes in order to be accepted as an Erasmus exchange student, Melek also needed to take an informal preparation in order to feel ready to live in a different country and society. However, this informal preparation was not rich for Melek because she mostly focused on the formal aspects, and complained about the lack of time and help in terms of preparing for the culture and language. She indeed trusted her “nomadic” skills concerning the adaptation period to a new environment. As she reported previously that she perceived her English language skills as relatively low to live in an English-speaking country, she was asked whether she took any action in improving her language skills. She admitted that she did almost nothing to improve her language skills, but she again trusted the TV series that she watched in terms of understanding the British accent. However, similarly to Ece’s case, the interesting point was that she did not know how to prepare exactly for language and culture. Nevertheless, some news or internet content related to England had started to grab her attention. For example, once while surfing on the internet, she came across a quick quiz aiming to assess whether she belonged in London or in Manchester. Although there were some other quizzes with different content, she picked that one to complete because she had started to develop some selective bias for the content related to England.

As the informal preparation was not clear for her, she treated herself as a tourist and searched for travel opportunities in England. Moreover, she claimed that most people chose to participate in the Erasmus program mostly for “fun” purposes, so she sometimes could not escape prioritizing travelling opportunities over academic life at Keele University. Indeed, once, she admitted that it would be enough for her to meet minimum passing criteria for the courses since passing them would be sufficient to demand credit recognition at the home university. Their group togetherness was also shaped around the formal and informal preparation, but they gathered mostly for completing formal processes instead of discussing the informal ways of preparing to live in England. Nevertheless, they developed group awareness as a result of their

common problems that they had during the formal processes. Melek, therefore, valued the existence and role of her peers during the whole preparation period.

Lack of a comprehensive informal preparation caused Melek to feel a decreasing excitement toward the departure date because she simply was aware of the upcoming uncertainty of living in a different country; therefore, the ambiguity and unpreparedness caused her to have a mixture of emotions and to lose her excitement. She noted that whatever she came across on the internet made up her preparation, so there were no systematic actions or supervision for them. Even though she made no intentional cultural preparation, she held some cultural understandings due to her own personal history. In the next section, her thought patterns regarding the cultural dynamics are explored.

4.1.2.5 (Inter)cultural Dynamics

“I have a limited knowledge of British culture”

Melek had already been exposed to different cultures both in Turkish and German contexts, so she was not foreign to the dynamics of experiencing different cultures. She in fact had a special interest in the atmosphere of airports and being present in contexts abroad. Adding her English language knowledge to such a “nomadic” history, she felt connected to the world outside of Turkey without any belonging. However, she limited her intercultural practices to watching some British TV series (e.g., Doctor Who) and reading some popular British books (e.g., Sherlock Holmes). In a sense, she viewed those popular products as cultural elements and proclaimed her interest in British culture.

As well as following some TV series and reading some books in English, she used her English knowledge to follow some social networking websites and internet media services (e.g., Twitter, BuzzFeed, and CNN). She claimed that she was glad to have some knowledge of English language because she had an access to those media services and TV series through their original language. On the other hand, she thought that she needed to develop her English skills through using it on different platforms since she was going to teach English in the future, so she said “I don’t

want to be a language teacher who does not speak English”. An interesting point, however, was that she again related her language knowledge to the possibility of increased job prospects in the future when asked about the benefits of knowing English; she did not only practice the language for consuming some popular products, but also hoped an increased chance for better jobs in the future. She, therefore, invested in her future through using English and at the same time had fun through consuming some popular English products.

With a self-reported limited understanding and knowledge of cultural elements, she could not escape creating some stereotyped opinions toward British culture. For instance, she gave their cultural practices as “tea with milk, theaters, Shakespeare, doing physical exercises”. Following these stereotyped or superficial cultural knowledge, she noted her lack of knowledge about British culture and how she came to hold those stereotyped opinions after watching some TV series and reading some books. However, she was planning to learn more about the culture before leaving Turkey, but she had a problematic view of the culture since she told the researcher that she would search for more information about tourist destinations when the focus was on culture.

Melek had obviously some interests in life in the UK even though this interest did not have deep cultural understandings. However, she also had a strong belonging in her Turkish culture:

I live here. I am used to the culture here. I love here and I will definitely miss Turkey when I am in England. I will most probably miss the country in terms of food and social connections. I think, after a while, a person may get bored due to trying to speak English all the time. We are more comfortable with speaking Turkish. I am a Turk and feel better in speaking Turkish. (Melek, 2nd Interview)

Although she followed some popular British culture practices such as watching their TV series, reading *BuzzFeed* articles, and following news in *CNN*, she did not acknowledge any belonging in the British culture. Nevertheless, she cultivated a certain level of sympathy in English-speaking cultures:

I feel close to their cultures because it is not something I don't have any idea about. Everyone at this department has something to say about British or American culture; however, I don't feel any belonging in their culture or practices. I don't have to love them. I am interested in their language, that's it. (Melek, 2nd Interview)

As she was interested mostly in their language and regarded it as a bridge to a better job in the future, she appreciated her peers' suggestions to speak English all the time when they were in England. However, Melek believed they might miss speaking Turkish and choose to speak in Turkish to each other. Again, she highlighted her strong belonging in her culture and native language even if it was her utmost aim to improve her English language skills. When asked also about her future practices in the target culture, she clearly underscored her intention to meet new people, but she did not plan to take deliberate actions to explore the culture. Instead, she chose to "observe" it; in this way, she claimed she might comprehend their cultural practices without any participation. Moreover, she found it strange when people updated their current addresses as the cities where they had moved to within the Erasmus program. This opinion also implied her plans to be an observer instead of a participator.

She, on the other hand, thought that she would be pushed toward being an "ambassador" of Turkish culture or society in England. While "introducing" the culture, however, she acknowledged that she was also a human with complexities and might not fully represent the culture:

At the end of the day we are all humans, we may not fully reflect our cultures. I won't force myself to act in accordance with my own culture by saying a Turk would act like this or that in such a situation. I will simply be myself. However, they may ask questions about my cultural practices for some specific situations, and I will try to answer their questions. For example, I may say we drink tea without milk.... However, I won't misrepresent myself; rather, I will act who I am. (Melek, 2nd Interview)

She seemed to be aware of that culture was situated in the context where it was heavily practiced, so, to her, it was natural not to represent its characteristics in contexts abroad; nevertheless, she considered introducing her own cultural practices when the curiosity toward it arose. She was also planning to be sarcastic for stereotyped questions toward her culture similarly to Ece's imagined attitude.

Overall Melek had a moderate interest in the British culture, but it was limited to popular products such as TV series, movies, and books. She also mentioned that she held some stereotyped opinions toward the British culture and did not know much about it. Moreover, she asserted her strong belonging in Turkish culture and language; as a result, she showed a tendency and willingness toward representing her culture in contexts abroad and acting like an ambassador. The interesting point about her cultural case was that she chose to observe a different culture instead of participating in it and seeking for a membership in that culture, so, in a sense, she viewed herself as a tourist even for a 4-month-period. Under all these cultural dynamics, her motives, expectations, plans, and concerns regarding her upcoming Erasmus experience are elaborated on in upcoming sections.

4.1.2.6 Future-oriented Thought Patterns

4.1.2.6.1 Motivations

“I want to improve my speaking skills”

Melek was, to some extent, aware of the potential outcomes of an international program in terms of professional and personal development as she said:

It is a program which helps you to improve in every sense. It helps you to improve yourself in terms of academic, social, and personal skills. You will live there on your own. You may say in the end that I have become an adult because I have done it on my own. It may bring you some confidence. (Melek, 2nd Interview)

She motivated herself in terms of a potential increase in her self-confidence with the help of her future experiences in England, but this was not the only motivation behind her Erasmus decision. As previously mentioned, she also thought that the experience would enhance her CV and increase her employability chances when she applied for desired job positions after her graduation. However, she also knew that only having it on her CV would not be enough for her to obtain a good job; she thought she needed also to prioritize academic aspects of the Erasmus program in order to develop professionally. Although, to her, most people chose to have fun and travel within the Erasmus program and tended to neglect the academic gains, she did

not want to be one of them. She uttered that she also aimed to have fun and travel from time to time, but she gave an equal weight to the academic aspects even if she planned to meet minimum passing criteria for the courses. She indeed had decided to work as an English language instructor at one of the universities in Turkey before applying to the Erasmus program:

I realized that I had no aim. I did not know what to do after graduation. I don't want to take KPSS exam [Public Personnel Recruitment Examination]... I just wanted to have an aim in life, then I drew a road map for myself; I decided to work as an English language instructor at a language preparatory school in Turkey; for that decision, I wanted to improve my speaking skills, then I applied for the Erasmus program. After the Erasmus, I consider applying to a master's degree program. (Melek, 1st Interview)

Her main motivation could be seen clearly from the quote above. She simply wanted to invest in her desired job position in the future and for that position she knew she had to improve her language skills, particularly her self-proclaimed low English speaking skills, which she hoped to improve with the help of the Erasmus program. The self-perceived positive correlation between her speaking skills and job prospects sometimes caused her to interpret some critical events in that direction. For example, during their preparation period, Melek learned that her other two peers would stay in the same dormitory in England, but she was placed in a different one. First, she perceived it as a disadvantage because of the loneliness risk, but then she turned it into an advantage in her mind:

I got very upset at the very beginning, but now I think I can turn that situation into an advantage. If we stayed all together in the same dorm, we would most probably hang out all together as Turkish people; we would speak Turkish all the time. Maybe it is better to have different dorms in England. By the way, the dorms are not far away from each other on the map, but having a separate dorm makes a difference. (Melek, 3rd Interview)

She thought she would have more opportunities for improving her speaking skills at a different dorm where she would have to only speak English. Furthermore, she was motivated to take a course offering to teach English pronunciation to nonnative speakers of English, so again, her main motivation of improving her speaking skills influenced her plans for the Erasmus program. Overall, she had both “fun” and “academic” intentions in mind. She also wanted to “push the limits” and go after her

motives which were mainly shaped around her desire to improve her English speaking and life skills; as a result, she expected to increase her self-confidence and job prospects. She also held some expectations in order to follow her goals in England. The next section focuses on her expectations.

4.1.2.6.2 Expectations

“I expect to find a more active education system in England”

Melek had a strong desire to maintain her motivations that pushed her to be a part of the Erasmus program. However, for that purpose, she held also a number of expectations from both the exchange program and the life in England. She thought if her expectations were not met in terms of the Erasmus program, she might fail to obtain the expected gains and perceive herself as an unsuccessful participant upon completing the program. Then what were these expectations?

First of all, she expected to find a more student-centered education system in England because she thought her current teacher education program sometimes pushed them to be passive listeners. However, she did not hold her teacher education program entirely responsible for her passive side:

I think this could also be because of the whole education system to which we have been exposed so far. They [British students] may have already got used to a more active system, but we are passive all the time. Educators here [the home university] are trying to make us more active, but we sometimes find it meaningless or think he or she wants us to do a lot of extra work since we are used to being passive students. I think they are more active in England. (Melek, 2nd Interview)

She also complained about the lack of practicum opportunities at her own teacher education context, and expected to benefit from the *reflective teaching* course which might involve some practicum components:

I would like to learn a lot from my reflective teaching course there [in England]. I don't think our courses here are much beneficial to us. We visit schools and practice teaching skills during our last year here. This really does not make any sense to me, too bad! We mostly cover theoretical issues here. I admit that we also have some micro-teachings, but they do not reflect the reality. (Melek, 2nd Interview)

Behind her desire to be more *active* could be her motivation to improve her speaking and teaching skills in order to be qualified as a desirable English language teacher. She, in a sense, expected to realize her goals through active participation in the academic communities in England. As for the potential socialization spaces, she believed that dormitory life, classes, and trips might help her to meet new people and expand her social networks. However, she held some expectations from officials who would organize social events to help international students to find a place in the existing social networks. She hopefully expected some support from local people or university officials in that regard because she found it unfair to be responsible for taking a full control over her own learning in the target context. She, therefore, expected to be supported and welcomed by the local students and officials. As a result, she believed that she could realize her goals in a co-constructive way with locals or with other international students.

She also expected a more open-minded and tolerating society in England in order to realize her goals. Moreover, she thought Turkish people had recently become too narrow-minded and created a polarized society. She, in a sense, had a first-hand experience of intolerance from their own country origin. She, therefore, expected to be welcomed and tolerated for her acts and opinions in the target society; otherwise, she was afraid of failing to adapt to the life in England.

If her expectations for the Erasmus program were met, she expected to be an English teacher who has good English speaking skills, high self-confidence and many international or British experiences, so she believed that she might share her experiences with her future students in order to motivate them thereby standing as a model for them. Again, if everything went well, she clearly expected this experience to increase her job prospects as she trusted the market value of her upcoming experiences in England. Her motivations and expectations could in fact be better understood while exploring her plans and concerns that are discussed in the upcoming two sections.

4.1.2.6.3 Plans

“I am Turk and I am not planning to speak with a British accent”

Melek’s plans for after graduation had the most remarkable impact on her plans for the Erasmus program. She wanted to be an English language instructor at one of the Turkish universities once she graduated. She, therefore, avoided taking the national exam that aimed to select language teachers for public schools in Turkey because she regarded the university setting as more appropriate for her already planned career. For her professional teaching career, Melek planned to improve her English skills with the help of the Erasmus experiences in England. Moreover, she planned to enroll in a master’s degree program in language teaching field in the future. These plans clearly showed her intentions to become a language teacher at a higher education context, so her Erasmus experience held a number of promises for her career.

As her main motivation and plan was to improve her speaking skills, she reserved a number of plans for that purpose. She, first of all, was aware that she needed to understand the British accent for an effective communication with British interlocutors. To improve her listening skills and develop an acquaintance with the British accent, she made some pre-departure plans such as watching British TV series, looking for online sources to pick up the differences between American and British accents. However, there were two problems preventing her from realizing her pre-departure plans for the British accent. First, she had limited time both because of formal steps and summer school. Second, she did not have a clear plan in terms of preparing for the accent. Again, as in the case of her cultural preparation, she lacked the knowledge, awareness, and assistance in preparing for her needs.

Another interesting point related to her plans regarding the British accent was that she did not have an intention for speaking with a British accent:

I am sure that when I go there, I won’t try to speak with a British accent. I don’t live in a fantasy world. I am Turk and I am not planning to speak with a British accent. I will speak it with a Turkish accent. I am only planning to

improve my fluency in English. There are some people who live in the fantasy world. (Melek, 1st Interview)

She indeed set realistic goals for herself concerning her plans for language skills, and she thought that having good English communication skills would open gates for her in Turkey. She, therefore, did not perceive acquiring an accent as a standard to be a nonnative English language teacher. However, the interesting point was that she had difficulty in understanding her peers who tried to speak with a British or American accent: “I see some friends who try to speak English with accent, but they look funny. I won’t do the same because they don’t know how funny they seem to us, I don’t want to be in the same situation”.

She clearly did not have any plans for acquiring a British accent in the near future, and she viewed her peers’ efforts as futile and sometimes embarrassing. However, she was keen on learning distinctive aspects of the British accent for her future language teaching career. As well as planning to increase her familiarity with the accent before leaving Turkey, she was also excited about her travelling plans. She overall regarded the Erasmus program as a good opportunity to improve her language skills, job prospects, and have touristic trips, so made her plans accordingly. For her touristic or travelling plans, she, first, wanted to have a list of destination or landmarks, and then have some detailed information about them because as she said “it is always better to have some pre-information about tourist attractions”. For that purpose, she planned to read some magazines or books before leaving Turkey.

On the other hand, she did not plan following local life or news when in England, but she knew she could be exposed to the major events inevitably. It was again possible to sense her *observer* side. She was also a consumer of some popular culture elements for which she had some plans, too. She gave some of her plans in that regard as seeing *Hamlet* performed by *Benedict Cumberbatch*, visiting *Baker Street*, *Harry Potter Studios*, *Big Ben*, and *London Eye*. Moreover, these target attractions emerged following her leisure activities in Turkey such as watching TV series or reading books.

Overall she held plans for before, during, and after the Erasmus program in a dynamic relationship with her other thought patterns. As she wanted to become an English language instructor in the future, she planned, first, to improve her listening and speaking skills in English. Second, she planned to visit some popular tourist attractions. Third, she wanted meet new people, so she did not plan to spend her whole period with the Turkish peers. Finally, she wanted to show active participation in her courses at Keele University to optimize her learning experiences. Her concerns and fears regarding her upcoming Erasmus experience are discussed in next section.

4.1.2.6.4 Concerns and Fears

“I don’t feel that my English skills are sufficient to study in England”

Although Melek was hopeful about realizing her plans, she also held some concerns and fears related to her future Erasmus experience. She was, therefore, cautious toward achieving her aims instead of fantasizing about them. She in fact showed some realistic signals when she first talked about her aims related to improving her language skills. She assured that she would not try to speak English with a British accent because she knew that the arranged Erasmus period would not be sufficient to acquire an accent. However, she confessed that she might not have enough courage that was necessary for initiating a conversation in English, but she trusted the nature of immersion in that regard to improve her speaking skills. She, therefore, believed that she would have to speak English thanks to her immersion experience.

Even though she felt that she might naturally improve her speaking skills, she was also concerned about the possibility of holding herself back and failing to improve her speaking skills. The reason behind that concern was her self-proclaimed low English speaking skills because she said that she could fail to express herself in English, feel embarrassed, and decide not to talk to anyone from that moment on. Under the influence of the disaster scenarios, she was, in a sense, uneasy about the possibility of failing to improve her speaking skills and spending most of her time with Turkish peers.

Besides being concerned about her language skills and gains, she also felt uneasy about experiencing a new higher education system. She was mainly concerned about the difficulty of the course requirements. Again, the core underlying reason for feeling tense with taking courses was her low trust in her language skills. When asked whether she was concerned about passing requirements, she said she was not concerned about passing the courses as they were expected to meet the minimum criteria for credit recognition; however, she was more concerned again about her language skills: “I don’t feel that my English skills are sufficient to study in England. I am not sure whether I will be able to understand course content or I will be able to communicate with the course instructors.”

She in fact was not willing to take "hard" courses because of her concerns about a new educational setting and language skills, so she tended to take “easier” courses. Although she had already been told by one of the exchange students that the courses did not demand more than her courses did at the home university, she was still concerned about the courses, possibly due to her self-reported low English language skills and the possibility of taking courses with and from native speakers of English. In that regard, while writing her imagined experiences at the target educational context, she stated that:

Some courses here are really hard. The reflective teaching course is the hardest for me. My communication with the instructors is also different here because I can’t ask every question in my mind. They look more serious than Turkish ones. Perhaps I can’t ask them because I may not express my opinions. (Melek, Imagined Experiences)

These lines above indeed summarized her concerns about the new educational context and her fears raised by her language skills; otherwise, she was not too much concerned about her adaptation and social skills as she had already got used to her “nomadic” lifestyle and visiting settings abroad.

Even though she was confident with her nomadic lifestyle, imagining her first week in England started to bother her prior to her departure because she was sure that it would be a difficult week. She, therefore, tried to prepare herself mentally for the anticipated difficulties; however, she once complained about why she was expected

to overcome every difficulty by herself. She, therefore, demanded the people at the dorm or in the host context to be empathetic toward her concerns and needs. As she had to leave her family behind for the first time, she was particularly concerned about dorm life:

When I first go there, I will definitely have difficulty with adaptation to the dorm life.... I might be surprised and feel strange when I share bathroom or kitchen with other people because I got used to living at home with my family. Apart from that, I might feel strange when I am left alone in my dorm room. (Melek, 3rd Interview)

She was naturally concerned about living in the dorm for the first time and staying alone without her twin who shared the room with her since her childhood. Having to live in an international context where she was supposed to speak English compounded her concerns and fears, so she needed and indeed expected a professional help from the host university. However, she still viewed having a different dorm from her peers as an advantage for improving her language skills. Overall, regarding her upcoming Erasmus experience, she was concerned about her language skills, the possibility of being trapped in her Turkish peer circle, difficulty of courses, adaptation period, and living in a dorm for the first time.

As a last point about Melek, the marked points on the *Salmon Line* deserve a few words. She marked a point closer to *ready* in her first interview, and she did the same for the last one. When asked about this similarity, she told that she had trusted in her personal history and felt ready to live in England during the first interview. However, in the last one, she approached the readiness with caution because she thought that there was always a possibility of adaptation difficulties; therefore, she believed that she had completed her preparation in Turkey and was ready to face with the uncertainty of the adaptation period. However, these marks on the Salmon Line should be interpreted carefully after reading all the case summary up to this point because some main points in her case summary such as her nomadic lifestyle, low trust in her language skills, future plans, anticipated difficulties of adaptation, and attachment to her Turkish identity played a key role in her thought patterns and

preparation period, and these points should be critically interpreted regarding her participation in the target life in England.

4.1.3 Nur's Case Description

4.1.3.1 Participant Profile

“I couldn't imagine all these things a few years ago”

Nur is a 21-year-old prospective teacher studying at the same English language teaching department with Melek and Ece. She was selected as an Erasmus candidate for Keele University in England and her exchange period was arranged for the fall semester in 2015-2016; as a result, she found herself as a member of the cohort that would study in England during the fall semester. Similar to Ece and Melek, Nur is also considered as a successful language teacher candidate thanks to her high CGPA. Her native language is Turkish, and she described her English proficiency level as advanced. Besides, she was learning German as a beginner level student. A different point from her peers' educational background was her transfer from another university to her current department. In her previous context she had some bad memories with her close friends and she did not want to study there anymore. For that decision she was also motivated by the relatively more prestigious status of her current university. She was, therefore, a newcomer at the current context as she had been there for only one semester at the time of the interviews.

As for her general life in Turkey, Nur tended to spend most of her time with her family as she had “close” bonds with her parents. During her undergraduate life she always lived with her parents. However, she experienced a dorm life when she was placed at a boarding high school; yet, she had a chance to visit and stay with her family members for the weekends thanks to the close proximity of her school. Interestingly, Nur is not the only person in the family who had a connection to language teaching; her mother is also an English language instructor at a state university in Turkey. She was regarded as an important figure by Nur regarding her important decisions including the one for the Erasmus program.

As she spent most of her life with her parents, leaving them for the first time for a long period of time caused her to feel uneasy about her upcoming Erasmus experience; however, she was the most excited candidate among her peers as she labelled the Erasmus period in England as “one of [her] biggest dreams in life”. Indeed, she felt that she had been very lucky until then in her life: “I couldn’t imagine all these things a few years ago. I couldn’t imagine studying here [at the current university], but I am here. I thought that I had missed the Erasmus opportunity after moving here..., but now I have England.”

Slightly after her transfer to current context, she thought that she had missed the Erasmus opportunity because it would have been impossible at her previous university to apply for the program if she had considered it for the last year of the undergraduate studies. After learning that there was no such an obstacle at her current university, she felt surprised and excited. Her surprise were compounded even more upon learning that England was among the options because she did not have that option in her previous context. Following all these “good coincidences” in her life, she naturally felt lucky and reported a heightened self-confidence.

She attributed her rising success mainly to her ambitious side as she always aimed the better for her life. This ambitious personality also brought some drawbacks such as being a “stressed” and “obsessive” person. In addition to these characteristics, she also reported that she had a fragile soul as she became emotional from time to time. However, what she complained about most was her withdrawn side as she stated that “there are people who can make friends easily, but I am not one of them. Yet, I want to be more outgoing when I live in England.” Alongside her withdrawn side, she reported a conservative approach to her daily life. Once, when she was talking about her plans for the Erasmus program, she told that she was not planning to spend too much time with parties as she had never consumed alcohol and cigarettes. Similar to Melek’s case, she viewed herself as “Muslim and Turk” and showed conservative tendencies with regard to those core values. Details of such issues as habit conservation are discussed in the upcoming sections, but before elaborating on her thought patterns regarding her cultural notions, her decision-making and preparation

journey toward studying at Keele University as an Erasmus exchange student are discussed first.

4.1.3.2 Decision-making Process

“I wouldn’t do it if it wasn’t for England”

In her previous educational context, Nur in fact was eligible to study in Spain within the Erasmus program. She, therefore, had to face two completely different choices at the same time: a better and more prestigious undergraduate teacher education or the Erasmus program in Spain. She decided to be transferred to her current department due to its “importance for her career prospects”, so she gave up on the Erasmus opportunity. However, she truly valued the Erasmus program for her university life. Thus, her passion toward Erasmus did not start at her current context as she had always wanted it since the beginning of her university life. After moving to her current higher education institution, Nur thought her Erasmus dream was over since she expected the same Erasmus conditions as in her previous institution. However, at her current context, students from every grade could apply for the Erasmus program; then, she reconsidered the Erasmus opportunity. Upon realizing that it was possible to choose England, she firmly decided to apply for it even shortly after her transfer.

England had a high value from her perspective because it was a “priceless opportunity” for her career, so it was worth to take all the risks. In fact, the major risk was prolonging graduation. Yet, she was hopeful that she would have all her courses at Keele University recognized by the home university, thereby graduate on time. Her family also encouraged her to apply for the Erasmus program and pick England as the first choice. She and her parents indeed did not underrate other country options, but after her recent transfer, she found England as the only valuable option; otherwise, she would be taking aimless moves without adapting to a new environment. Her transfer was in fact a move toward her career-oriented goals, so she, in a sense, always aimed the better. The England option was another move for *the better* from both her and her parents’ perspective.

She apparently valued the England option after her transfer. However, she wanted to study also in Spain while she was studying at her previous context, so what motivated her back then? It was the positive image of the Erasmus program and her self-reported need to gain international experiences for her career prospects. To her, in order to gain that experience, “Erasmus [was] the most convenient one” since she would be provided with a grant and systematic procedures including course selection, credit recognition, accommodation, and adaptation. She indeed avoided taking risks and looked for a more settled option for having an international experience. She was highly motivated by the career prospects and viewed international programs as beneficial to her career. At the same time she looked for a safe program in which she could both have fun and improve herself.

She was also influenced by the stories of previous exchange students and wanted to have her own good memories. These stories told to her mostly included travelling experiences, and naturally she desired to have the same joyful travelling experiences. Following this overall positive image of the Erasmus program and its potential contributions to her career, she decided to apply for the program at both her previous and current educational context. Although she was obsessed with the England option, she did not devalue other options such as German and Spanish universities. However, as mentioned before, she told that she would not accept other options if she was not placed at Keele University, so the England option naturally emerged as the most valuable one since she felt a strong need to improve her English skills:

I learn the language of England. If I went to Spain, everybody would be speaking Spanish, only courses would be in English.... I would experience the same in Germany, too. Europeans may speak good English, but such an opportunity in England where everyone speaks English is like gold. There are some people who don't choose to study in England because they think it is too expensive to live there, but I focused only on England and made my decision accordingly. (Nur, 1st Interview)

She clearly wanted to focus on improving her English skills as a prospective English language teacher; therefore, the England option stood out among other options with more promises. Moreover, she thought that England had a “wow” factor compared to other options:

There are people who choose to study in Czech Republic, which seems something ordinary to me.... It must be an option for which I must say “wow”. England and Spain makes me say that. Of course other countries are also valuable, but I have a different situation here and I look for the best for my situation. (Nur, 1st Interview)

Based on the overall analysis of her utterances so far, she might not have a clear and deep understanding of what short-term international exchange programs offer to her in terms of personal, (inter)cultural, and professional skills. She apparently relied on the positive image of the program, the prestige of England option for her current teacher education program, the possibility of improving her English skills, travelling opportunities, and nice memories told by previous exchange students. She, as a summary of her decision-making, told that “I chose both studying and travelling”.

Following her decision-making, she waited for the results to be announced. On the day of the announcement, she checked the website every five minutes with an increasing excitement. When she learned that she was placed at Keele University, she cheered in joy and shared the news with everyone close to her. After that exciting day of announcements, she was ready to embrace a preparation period.

4.1.3.3 Formal Preparation

“I wish we had a less stressful process with fewer documents”

After making her final decision on the England option, Nur had to handle a series of formal preparation before her Erasmus period began. She had almost five months to complete all the formal procedures which involved paperwork including passport, visa, accommodation, leave of absence, and learning agreement between universities. From Nur’s utterances in regard to her formal preparation, it was easily understood that she was not satisfied with the help that she received from the officials. Although she stated at the end of the preparation period that completing formal procedures was not as difficult as they had anticipated, she seemed to have needed a systematic help from officials concerning course selection and visa procedures. In addition to her desire for more help, she expected a tolerating, welcoming, and empathetic attitude toward their needs; yet, she felt disappointed with the officials’ help and attitude toward them.

Nur also wanted to graduate on time without being negatively affected by her Erasmus period, so she expected to receive credit recognition for the courses that she would take at Keele University. However, in a similar vein to Ece and Melek, she felt disappointed with the help concerning which courses to take at the host university in order to collect the desired credits at the home university. As the formal preparation involved both universities, she held some opinions for the attitude of the host university toward their preparation, too. Similar to her peers' opinions, Nur expressed her satisfaction with their helpful attitude toward them and regarded the host university as "more helpful" compared to the home university. As for their time in England, she expected Global Education Team (GET) at Keele University to help them with their adaptation process and socialization attempts. There was no ESN team there but she believed that GET was also capable of handling study abroad issues and organizing events for them. For example, they promised to provide pick-up service from airport, organize global education fair where they would help international students to know each other and introduce their country.

On the other hand, although she complained about the lack of help, clarity, and empathy while completing formal procedures at the home context, she appreciated the existence of her peers, Melek and Ece, beside her:

I feel lucky because three of us are female and last year students with similar characteristics, what else would I want?... When we first found each other during the first informative meeting, we felt quite surprised and happy thanks to the similarities among us. It is nice to have them beside me. (Nur, 2nd Interview)

She believed that having other people who shared the same concerns and characteristics helped her to ease the process and feel supported. However, there was also a negative side to their togetherness from Nur's view:

As we act as a group all the time, I think we make each other more anxious. Some other people who are preparing for Erasmus do not seem as anxious as we are. You may have noticed that we dramatized visa procedures and we even thought they might not approve our visa application. I really felt anxious. This was because of our huge influence on each other. I might have felt more relaxed if I were alone during this process. (Nur, 3rd Interview)

With a critical and realistic approach, Nur found both the positive and negative sides of a phenomenon: group togetherness. Although she truly appreciated having her peers beside her during all those challenging processes, she also realized that they had formed group togetherness in which one's opinions or concerns influenced the others.

Following all those formal steps, it was a common opinion among group members that the process had been stressful for all of them. However, having their peers beside them and having the opportunity of asking their questions to Ceren, who was already in England studying at Keele University, helped them to lower the level of their stress. When asked what she would like to change about the formal preparation, Nur stated that:

I wish we had a less stressful process with fewer documents, but, thanks god, we have Ceren. It would be much more difficult if we didn't have her, but still it was quite stressful. We collected many documents. I don't understand why everyone takes it too serious, why? Documents, documents, documents... Money, money, money... I would like to have a less expensive process. I would like not to have British pound because its value increases for ever and ever. Of course, that visa procedure... I wish they had not made obtaining a visa too difficult. My parents also panicked just because of that visa procedure. (Nur, 3rd Interview)

She, with the quote above, summed up the difficulties she had experienced during her formal preparation with a focus on three main issues: the excessive number of required documents, spending a significant amount of money, and difficult visa procedure. During all those difficulties, the worst part was the lack of an empathetic and helpful attitude toward their situation. Alongside grappling with formal procedures, she needed to complete her course requirements and to take steps regarding their informal preparation, so her stress level was always high. On the other hand, she tended to neglect the importance of an informal preparation due to the busy schedule of formal steps. She, in a sense, focused mostly on the formal aspects of the preparation, and her questions were mostly related to those formal aspects when she interacted with Ceren who was already in England. Nevertheless, she did not ignore her informal preparation completely as it is discussed in the next section.

4.1.3.4 Informal Preparation

“I want it to be a surprise”

As the preparation period also involved informal aspects of the Erasmus program, Nur needed to think about how to live in a different country context. However, she was prone to neglecting a systematic preparation. She indeed wanted her Erasmus experience to be a “surprise” for her. The underlying reason behind this attitude in fact was a lack of sufficient time to prepare for living in England since she constantly complained about having insufficient time to learn more about life in England. While completing the formal procedures, she complained also about the extensive paperwork, so hoped to prepare during the summer months prior to her departure. However, she wanted to take courses during summer school in order to graduate on planned date; therefore, she had difficulty in finding an appropriate time to spend sufficient time on informal preparation which, from her perspective, was supposed to include language practice and cultural learning. Yet, the problem could be more related to the lack of supervision or guidance because she might have avoided such informal issues due to her lack of knowledge or awareness.

Her understanding of informal preparation was actually based on touristic aspects of an international program rather than on deep (inter)cultural issues. When asked about what type of preparation she would take regarding the life in England, she told that she would search for tourist attractions or some social events such as concerts, theatre, plays through the internet. Moreover, regarding her interaction with Ceren who was already there, she noted that she mostly asked “basic things” about the daily routines in England and wanted to get some practical hints for her life in England.

All her actions and opinions regarding her informal preparation could be understood better when cultural dynamics around her cultural understanding are discussed in the next section. To sum up her informal preparation, it could well be said she lacked the necessary knowledge and awareness to prepare better for her upcoming experiences, so she relied on what Ceren told them and on online sources. However, she still relied on touristic aspects of her upcoming experience and reduced preparation to

obtaining some factual information about the target culture and host university. Reducing it to touristic aspects indeed showed how she simplified the informal preparation.

4.1.3.5 (Inter)cultural Dynamics

“I will feel like a tourist outside the campus”

Nur, who described herself as a “normal Turk and Muslim”, had never been in a context abroad so she implied that she might not hold a broad understanding of cultural concepts due to her limited intercultural experiences. However, she still held some cultural knowledge about the life in England based on her language learning history, teacher education context, TV series, movies, and the stories told by other people. As these sources were not reliable enough for her to delve into deep cultural analyses, she admitted possessing stereotypes regarding the target culture. She was indeed aware of the need to experience a culture in order to be able to express reliable opinions on it. Otherwise, she stated that a person might hold stereotypes toward a culture or just express some book information. Nevertheless, she shared her knowledge of British culture as:

They say that British people are cold. For example, I talked to a girl a few days ago who studies in Leeds and she told that they may act cold even during the visa process.... I think I have prejudices toward the British people, I know it. In addition, British breakfast is famous, so I will try it when I go there....I want to visit London as it is my dream to see London. I will also observe people in order to understand how they behave and whether they are as cold as mentioned. (Nur, 2nd Interview)

In accordance with the quote above, the only thing in her imagined experiences related to her cultural views was the mention of British breakfast, which again showed the depth of her (inter)cultural knowledge or understanding. In addition to her stereotyped knowledge of the life in England, she also described England and some other European countries as “hardworking”, “powerful”, “rich”, and “perfect” in every sense. She indeed tended to heighten the positive image of “powerful” European countries and expected to find a *homogenous, wealthy, and hardworking* society.

On the other hand, she found a chance to meet two Canadian girls, who were originated in Korea, while preparing for her upcoming Erasmus experience. She met them at her home campus totally by chance and maintained the communication with them over a significant period of time. They talked about their different religious backgrounds or about the approaching general elections in Turkey and compared political systems in both countries. Moreover, Nur found a chance to improve her English speaking skills and regained her confidence in speaking English: “I feel hopeful toward developing my English in England because I feel more confident in speaking English now. To be honest, at first, I didn’t have that confidence, but I gained it after talking to those [Canadian] girls.”

This intercultural experience in Turkey with Canadian girls in fact helped her to realize some complexities of intercultural encounters even though they exchanged basic factual information related to their own cultures and she came to realize how cultures could be different, so it was a moment of revelation for her. Even if she valued the role of intercultural contact following her experiences with Canadian girls, she still tended to position herself more as a tourist within the Erasmus program because she highlighted mainly exploring popular places. Since she labelled herself as “tourist outside the campus”, she did not expect to face any discrimination or prejudice. She implicitly put forward that she would not have to communicate with locals except some superficial exchanges, so she hoped she would not face rejection or discrimination with such a tourist mindset.

Even though she adopted a passive role and did not expect any discrimination, she was still scared to experience a possible discriminatory or prejudiced attitude toward her. She was scared because, in her opinion, Turkey was not a European country and lacked a positive image among European societies, so there was always a possibility of being rejected and excluded from social networks. As a potential coping strategy with a racial or religious discrimination, Turkish peer circle was seen as a last resort despite the necessity to expand her social networks and to improve her English language skills. In fact, she did not have sound strategies to cope with a possible negative attitude toward her ethnic and religious background. As she was also

concerned about her withdrawn side as a potential cause of desocialization, she hoped that if people heard that she was an Erasmus student, they might approach her to start a conversation. Yet, this was also not a meaningful strategy to socialize in the target society.

To sum up the cultural dynamics around her upcoming Erasmus experience, she reported a lack of cultural knowledge and holding stereotypes since she did not have a sufficient and systematic intercultural or international education at her teacher education context and did not have any experience abroad. She only had that intercultural experience with Canadian girls in Turkey, which helped her to understand few intercultural dynamics and to improve her speaking skills. However, she tended to adopt a tourist role for her Erasmus experience and looked for a passive role in the target context. She was also concerned about discrimination and prejudice against her; nevertheless, she planned to be open-minded, tolerant of differences, and expected the same attitude in England. In the upcoming sections, her thought patterns (i.e., motives, expectations, plans, concerns) regarding her upcoming Erasmus experience are shared and discussed.

4.1.3.6 Future-oriented Thought Patterns

4.1.3.6.1 Motivations

“My every second in England is precious”

Nur described her Erasmus opportunity in England as “one of [her] lifetime dreams” during the interviews, so “[her] every second in England [was] precious”. She, therefore, attached a more heightened meaning to her upcoming experience than her peers and defined herself as “a fan” of England, so her motives for choosing to study in England drew a special attention. From a broader perspective, she shared her motives as improving her life and English skills, enhancing her CV, and travelling across the UK and EU. Moreover, she was not much motivated about taking courses at Keele University and tended to see them as mandatory to take, but still felt excited from time to time about a new educational context.

Regarding her desire to improve her language skills, she complained about the lack of practice opportunities in teacher education contexts in Turkey, so England option was a priceless one to improve her speaking skills in which she regarded herself as the weakest:

I feel very concerned about my language skills. To be honest, I don't think that I am good at speaking English. Sometimes I don't know what to say and run out of words; that's why, I go to England to improve it. I think being under a challenging situation will help me improve it. In Turkey we don't have it. (Nur, 2nd Interview)

She was motivated to improve her English with the help of the necessity to speak English in England, and she believed that the planned duration for the program was sufficient to realize that goal. She also thought that an English teacher should possess good language skills in order to obtain a legitimate position in the education system although she was not planning to be a teacher. She, therefore, believed that the Erasmus opportunity in England would help language teacher candidates to improve their speaking skills, which was difficult to achieve in Turkey from her perspective.

As for her desire to improve her life skills, she told that she had always wanted to stand on her own legs since she did not find much chance to prove herself and spent most of her life with her parents in Turkey. Furthermore, her parents had low trust in her life skills and thought she might not be able to take care of herself in England, but she was sure she would cope with the challenges and prove herself. When her imagined experiences were examined, it was seen that she reserved a special focus on her life skills in England:

Erasmus has become one of the best experiences in my life as I have seen that I could stand on my own legs. I handle my responsibilities on my own; I prepare my own food; I communicate with foreign people in a foreign language; I test my own limits and see what I can achieve on my own. I decide on my expenses with my monthly allocated budget because everything here is too expensive. I decide on everything by myself. I feel much freer here.... This was my dream and I feel no regret because I headed toward my dream no matter what challenges I faced. I travel a lot and meet many new people. Although I could not imagine being here one year ago, now I have the best memories of my life. (Nur, Imagined Experiences)

The quote above indeed summarized her motivations to be a part of the Erasmus program in England. If everything went according to her plans and imaginations, she thought these valuable experiences would enhance her CV, too. She particularly thought that having a *reflective teaching* course at Keele would “look nice” on her CV. However, in a general sense, she seemed to be focusing on the face value of the Erasmus in England since the country had a prestigious image in her mind. In addition to improving her language and life skills, she was also motivated with the opportunity to travel to tourist destinations. In a sense, she aimed to improve her language and life skills and to be a tourist during her spare times. As a result, she thought she would end up with an enhanced CV and valuable memories. She also held some expectations in order to follow her goals in England. The next section focuses on her expectations.

4.1.3.6.2 Expectations

“I believe that I can answer every question about England when I return to Turkey”

Since Nur was a “fan” of England, she sometimes romanticized her expectations about the Erasmus program and often reduced it to touristic opportunities besides improving her life and language skills. Once she even told that it would be enough for her to breathe the air in England. Moreover, throughout her preparation period, Nur tended to imagine her future Erasmus experiences with an optimistic attitude, so she hoped and expected to achieve most of her goals without facing any major obstacles or problems. However, she sometimes set aside her romanticized views and focused on the complex nature of the upcoming sojourn. During those realistic moments, she realized that she could face some negative events such as discrimination and culture shock; therefore, she later developed a different set of realistic expectations to realize her goals. One of these expectations was to be welcomed and tolerated by the host community, so she expected local students and people to be friendly and open to communication. As she thought that British people were cold depending on the stories she had heard, she also wanted to overcome such stereotyped opinions after being welcomed by the individuals in England.

Although she expected a friendly attitude toward her, she admitted holding some prejudices toward other religions or foreign societies; however, she did not express any ethnocentric opinions about different religions and societies; rather, she remained respectful for all different opinions. She, therefore, expected a mutual respect during the interactions with people in the target society even though both parties possibly had prejudices toward each other. However, she did not expect any hostile behaviors as an Erasmus student because she observed in Turkey that Turkish students welcomed Erasmus students with curious eyes and a desire to speak English with them. Yet, she needed to come to realize that an intercultural communication might require mutual efforts.

Besides expecting to establish sincere communication with people in England, she also expected to improve her English skills by the end of her sojourn period. Particularly, she expected to practice her English fairly often at the dorm where she would stay for whole Erasmus period. She valued the opportunity to live with international students at the same place since she had to speak English if she wanted to have social interactions with them. Moreover, the language that she would be exposed to in England would be “natural”:

We usually teach grammatical structures of English here; the basic things, rules, and typical sentences all the time... There in England people do not speak the sentences that we are being taught here. They speak different English. I mean they use daily expressions. Everything will be natural there. I will see that natural life and observe natural people. (Nur, 2nd Interview)

She clearly thought that she had no direct access to authentic English in Turkey, so this opportunity of studying at an English university even for a short-time would help her to develop an authentic language repertoire. In fact, she did not only expect to improve her language skills, she also expected that this experience in England would open her eyes to the cultural aspects of the language. In a sense, she expected to connect the bridge between language and culture as a prospective language teacher despite having no clear intention to become an English teacher. When asked to tell her opinions regarding the most prominent benefit of the Erasmus program in

England for future English language teachers, she gave it as the improvement of the cultural knowledge:

My mother is also an English language teacher, but she does not know much about English culture, and she sometimes is unable to answer students' questions related to the culture. I believe that I can answer every question about England when I return to Turkey. I mean I can answer what people eat, how they are, how they behave, how their education system is, what the differences are between education systems; I mean I can compare here [Turkey] and there [England]. Even I can answer whether the roads are clean there [in England] or not. It is not only the language but also the culture that I will learn there.... I believe that an English teacher with cultural knowledge would be one step ahead. (Nur, 2nd Interview)

From Nur's perspective, a prospective English teacher with an international experience in England would be valued both by the employers and the students due to the increased language and cultural knowledge and practice. However, she held some concerns related to a potential identity crisis or change after her sojourn. In fact, this concern was a result of her parents' expectations toward her future experience, so this individual was under the influence of different factors and not independent from them while shaping her expectations:

My family would be very upset if they saw me as someone different upon my return. They have already told me to come back as I was before the sojourn, as a normal Turk and Muslim. I may change, question myself; however, I think there will be no radical change; I hope it will not happen.... I try to keep a balance between my parents' desires and mine; I am not a person who is totally dependent on her family either. (Nur, 2nd Interview)

It was very interesting to hear that her parents warned her not to go through radical changes after the Erasmus program. Due to her parents' expectations, she might feel limited and inhibited during her period in England, thereby setting a barrier to the development of her intercultural competence and a possible transformation. This situation might also prevent her from expanding her social network, thus limiting her linguistic and intercultural gains.

Regarding an overall picture of her expectations, it could well be said that she expected to visit popular attractions, expand her social network with the help of tolerance toward her background, practice productive language skills, learn more

about culture; she indeed expected to achieve all of these without experiencing a radical change in order to keep her family pleased. As for her academic expectations, she did not reserve many expectations because she, as already reported, planned to meet minimum criteria to pass courses. Her motivations and expectations should in fact be reviewed after delving into her plans and concerns that are discussed in the upcoming two sections.

4.1.3.6.3 Plans

“I am planning to go and talk to people”

In the long run, Nur wanted to become a professor at a Turkish university. For this reason, she thought that exploring different educational systems might help her to broaden her views and enrich her future instructional practices. However, before climbing all the way up to being a professor, she believed that she needed to improve her language and life skills. She, therefore, ranked her plans for the program in England as language improvement, travelling, and participating in a different educational system. However, she prioritized her language and travel plans over the academic ones, but from her perspective, this did not mean to give up on her courses at Keele; she planned to learn as much as possible from those courses at Keele, too. However, she also noted that she would not place too much importance over her academic life at Keele University; however, she was decisive enough to meet basic requirements to pass every course that she would take at Keele. Since she had a limited time to achieve all those goals in England, she had to specify her priorities, and she prioritized travelling and socialization goals over others.

As this was the first time for Nur to visit abroad, she wanted to spare a considerable amount of time to travelling across the UK and, if possible, across the EU. As discussed earlier, she placed travelling among her top plans as she did not want to limit herself with only the Keele campus. For that purpose, she started to search for possible places to visit before leaving Turkey; this was indeed one of the main preparations that she made within her informal preparation. One of her imagined experiences illustrated her travelling desire well:

I have almost visited every city in England with the help of a travelling club; London, Manchester, Leeds, and many others... London was already one of my dreams and words can't describe the time that I spent there. I have Christmas holiday ahead of me and I am visiting five countries: France, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, and Germany. I fully enjoy my time here as this is the first time abroad. (Nur, Imagined Experiences)

Her constant emphasis on her travelling plans brought her touristic perspective to the fore as she had already mentioned that she would adopt a tourist mindset outside the campus. She was in fact not planning to participate in local practices but to have sightseeing of popular attractions or to visit different cities in both the UK and the EU. Although she had a limited view and plans of participating in local practices, she planned to be more outgoing and self-initiated regarding her interactions with local people and host students. In order to achieve her socialization goals, she viewed student trips, dormitory life, and class settings as potential spaces to meet new people. However, she was not planning to spend much time at “party hard” settings for socialization purposes since she described herself as a “normal Turk and Muslim” who would normally avoid such situations, but she emphasized her open-side and promised at least once to observe such an environment.

Although she did not mention it explicitly among her sojourn plans, Nur also planned to improve her life skills and stand on her own legs both in England and in Turkey after her exchange period: “I have never had an opportunity to stand on my own legs, so I would like to become free and self-contained. I mean I want to solve everything on my own. These could be both material and nonmaterial issues.” The most visible example of that desire was her plan of learning to cook before going abroad because she had always relied on her family regarding her survival and life decisions. In fact, she was very ambitious to surprise her parents with her increased life skills and life accomplishments in England when she returned to Turkey after her sojourn.

Overall Nur planned to improve her language and life skills throughout her Erasmus period. At the same time, she planned to travel and explore new places during her spare times. As for the educational plans, she wanted to meet basic requirements to pass courses in order to allocate more time for social and fun aspects of the program, which she thought could also be beneficial to her ongoing development. However,

she was also aware of the fact that realizing her goals and plans would be not be easy but with challenges and difficulties, so she held a number of concerns which are discussed in the next section.

4.1.3.6.4 Concerns and Fears

“I have all the responsibility there [in England]; I am not sure how to handle it.”

As it was the first time for Nur to visit and live abroad, she was mainly concerned about her life skills in a different country far away from her family members. At the home context, she received a significant amount of help from her parents regarding her daily life. However, in England, she was expected to handle every detail of her daily life on her own; therefore, she felt tense prior to her exchange period concerning her life skills:

I have never been to abroad; I have never left my parents behind. Now they put a pressure on me, saying that I won't be able to take care of myself there [in England].... I also have some problems related to my eating habits; I don't eat everything. How will I take care of myself? I have to do everything by myself. (Nur, 1st Interview)

Nur, therefore, wanted to learn how to cook before living in England in order to overcome her concerns about living on her own. In fact, she treated the Erasmus opportunity as a crucial step in her life toward becoming an *individual* who is free from the dependency on other people. In addition to holding concerns regarding her daily life in England, she was also concerned about failing to realize her goals in terms of socialization and language improvement. This concern emerged as a result of different factors:

First, Nur thought that the time allocated for her sojourn period might not be sufficient to realize all her goals. Second, she was worried about spending most of her time with her Turkish peers, thereby failing to expand her social network and improve her language, social, and intercultural skills. Third, Nur was concerned about initiating a conversation with native speakers of English and failing to understand the British accent during her adaptation period. Besides, she had a low

trust in her English speaking ability, so she lacked self-confidence in speaking English fluently with complex sentences; thus, she was concerned about the possibility of failed communication and social isolation in England. Fourth, she regarded prejudices toward Turkey or Turkish people as potential barrier to her language and socialization goals because she thought that Turkey did not have a positive image in Europe. She, therefore, believed that she might face with rejection or prejudices toward her. This example illustrated that concern well: “they may not welcome our Turkish background. They might show a positive attitude to those who come from a European country, but to those coming from Turkey...” She did not complete her sentence in order to highlight the potentially stark difference between the attitudes toward people with different backgrounds. She clearly was concerned about a prejudiced attitude toward her background.

These concerns above broadly explained why she was not confident in realizing her main goals regarding socialization and language improvement. Apart from those integration and communication concerns, Nur was also worried about adapting to a new educational environment since she thought the time allocated for the exchange period and their international status might be insufficient for their classmates and instructors to accept them as legitimate students. The challenges of adaptation to a new country setting, new cultural practices, using the second language all along compounded her concerns about adapting to a new educational context. She in fact had already experienced some adaptation challenges during her transfer from her previous teacher education context to a new one, so having another challenging process shortly after the previous one might put her under compounded unease. However, she was optimistic about her adaptation to the school practices at Keele University in her imagined experiences:

I take four courses here. My biggest concern before coming here was to have difficulties in understanding and following the courses here, but it is indeed not that much scary. There are many Erasmus students here besides British students and both instructors and other people welcome and help us as much as they can. I really liked the education system here as I learn many new things about the field I study. It feels really different being a student in Europe. (Nur, Imagined Experiences)

The interesting point in the quote above was her implicit concern about sharing the same context with native speakers of English, but she relieved herself with the existence of other international students. However, she expected a welcoming attitude toward her educational needs. Lastly, Nur held some concerns about financial issues concerning her expenditures in England. Since the UK currency was almost four times more valuable than Turkish lira, she felt worried about how to use her budget wisely. Moreover, she spent a significant amount of money on flight tickets, visa application, and accommodation. The problems indeed were the insufficient amount of the grant that was provided to them because it was only sufficient to meet their accommodation expenses. However, she was promised with a financial aid by her parents and she indeed thought the experience in England would worth for all the expenses throughout her sojourn period.

Overall Nur was concerned about her life and language skills, socialization, communication with native speakers of English, prejudices toward her background, adapting to a new education setting, and financial issues. As a last point about Nur, her *Salmon Line* marks deserve some elaboration. She marked a point closer to *not ready* in her first interview; however, she did the opposite for the last one. When asked about this difference, she told that she mentally prepared herself to cope with the challenges in England and started to feel more confident after handling a series of formal preparation although she still was concerned about the points that were discussed in this last section. However, these marks of her on the Salmon Line should be interpreted carefully after reading the entire case summary up to this point since human conduct is more complex than reducing it to two marks that aimed to summarize the preparation period.

4.2 Superordinate Themes: Bringing an Interpretative Depth to the Lived and Imagined Experiences

This study focused on three overarching aims. First, the lived experiences involving participants' decision-making and preparation process were explored. Second, the imagination of participants regarding their upcoming Erasmus experience was investigated. Third, the potential contributions of the program to the participants'

development as English language teachers were closely examined. Following a deeper analysis of the case summaries through the researcher's interpretations, it was found that participants' experiences were shaped by five superordinate themes, namely *a complex and dynamic decision-making process, a stressful formal preparation, a chaotic and undervalued informal preparation, emerging (inter)cultural dynamics involving the target culture, and interrelated future-oriented dynamic thought patterns.*

4.2.1 Complex and Dynamic Decision-making Process

First of all, as England was the most desired destination among prospective English language teachers at that specific context thanks to its relevance to their ongoing teacher education, the most successful candidates were selected for the England destination with the help of their relatively higher English language skills and CGPA. However, the selected candidates had their own individual and complex reasons before making their final decision. For example, while Ece was encouraged by her immediate social networks to study in England due its prestigious place among language teacher candidates, Melek wanted to enrich her ongoing teacher education with a valuable international experience in England; Nur, on the other hand, defined herself as a fan of the UK and thought that an Erasmus experience in England would help her to advance her career. Although the main reasons on the surface differed among the individuals, the main underlying motives behind their final decision were to enhance their ongoing language teacher education and gain access to new forms of capital. They, therefore, expected to open up new career prospects thanks to the self-reported high market value of the Erasmus program and a chance to develop their English language and survival skills in which they viewed themselves as weak even though they were about to obtain a bachelor's degree in an English language teaching program. Besides these strong motivators, they believed this experience would bring them fun and adventure, so they viewed their upcoming Erasmus experience as full of academic and adventure promises.

The participants, however, hesitated before their final decision due to the uncertainty and challenges of an international experience, their relatively low budgets, and their

concerns for credit recognition and graduation; nevertheless, with the help of encouragement and support by their families and friends, and potential benefits offered by the Erasmus program, they made their final firm decision. Generally speaking, they had the agency over their decisions even though the process was complex involving different interrelated individual factors. This complexity in fact could be the reason behind Ece's and Melek's last minute England decision.

Another interesting point was that the participants focused on countries instead of particular universities while listing their preferences; this indeed showed how they prioritized the prestigious England option for their ongoing teacher education and their future language teaching career even if they were not sure about the quality of the education in the UK. Nur, for instance, focused only on the England option as the only worthwhile destination due to her own academic history; however, she did not elaborate much on her university choice. In a sense, participants expected their *prestigious* international experiences in England to turn automatically into benefits, no matter where they were placed at in England. This positive image of England, in fact, emerged from their language learning history, media, literature, and word of mouth.

Their course selection process also reflected much about the dynamics behind their decision-making process. Since they were motivated both by the academic and fun factors, they avoided taking "hard" courses depending upon the suggestions made by the exchange students who were already studying at the same host university; thus, they wanted to allocate more time for the exploration of the UK. On the other hand, there was no report of teacher educators' influence on their study abroad decision, which possibly indicated an underestimation of internationalization efforts at that particular context. The participants, rather, relied on the positively constructed image of an Erasmus experience in England. Overall they underwent a complex and dynamic decision-making process that evolved around the interplay of different individual factors.

4.2.2 A Stressful Formal Preparation

After being selected for the Erasmus program in the UK, participants experienced a stressful formal preparation period. They mainly struggled with the learning agreement document on which they were expected to list which courses they would take at the host university and for which courses they would demand credit recognition at the home university. Although they knew that there was no certain answer for this process, they complained about the lack of empathy and support toward their struggles since, from their point of view, officials provided ambiguous responses and left them on their own for most of the time. Officials, in a sense, “did nothing more than they were expected to do” as Melek complained about. Having to complete a number of other official documents as part of their formal preparation, too, the participants often felt helpless and lonely. As a result, they wished for a more clear and systematic support from their home university.

When asked for their expectations from the coordinators, Melek, for example, made it clear that the one at ICO had more candidates to help than their coordinator at the department, so she expected more help and support from him:

We expect him to seem interested in our progress when he sees us at the department. We really need and expect such an interest from the department during our preparation. You really want to see that they support you along the way, but unfortunately we don't see it. Of course we don't want them to treat us like babies, but when they see us, they can at least ask some questions about our progress. (Melek, 3rd Interview)

One clarification is needed here. She did not blame the officials for not helping her since she thought that they fulfilled her basic expectations; however, she said she would have been happier if people from her department had been more interested in their preparation. In fact, she also recommended officials to reconsider the number and the content of the informative meetings. They only had one meeting shortly after they were selected as an Erasmus candidate, and she found the meeting as simply insufficient for their needs:

I think the informative meeting could have been better. They held that meeting for everyone who were selected for Erasmus. Only one official held the meeting and we only listened to her, so we couldn't ask our questions. We

started our preparation simply without knowing what we were expected to do exactly. They could have arranged a number of meetings for students who were selected for particular universities.... We didn't understand much about what we were going to do. (Melek, 3rd Interview)

Since the officials at the home context did not satisfy the participants in terms of a systematic and clear formal preparation, they, as an alternative solution to their difficulties, contacted previous Erasmus students who was or had been at the host university. Since they could not obtain sufficient information regarding which courses to take, they asked about “easy courses” from those exchange students, which in fact implied that they did not want to spend most of their time on courses while in England but to reserve sufficient time for fun and adventure, too.

They all, however, needed to think about their re-entry to the home university and to ask for credit recognition as part of their graduation requirements, so they felt a necessity to take the *reflective teaching* course for the replacement with the *school experience* course at the home university. However, this concern did not mean that they were too eager to benefit from the course as Melek contended that she would not take the course if it had not been for the replacement with the *school experience* course. She, in a sense, underestimated the potential benefits of reflective teaching or school observation at an international context; rather, she regarded the course as appropriate for credit recognition instead of focusing on its potential long-term benefits. This practical and superficial way of thinking was actually understandable since they were naïve in that process and tended to preserve their priorities in life like graduation on time. The interesting point, however, was that the participants were not able to obtain information beyond practical issues related to living in a foreign country because they needed some quick tips about the procedures such as phone services in England, services at the dorm, money transfer, visa, learning agreement, etc., so they did not prioritize deeper issues regarding culture and socialization or social integration.

Regarding the support and interest from the host university, the participants expressed more positive opinions. They particularly appreciated having an opportunity to meet other students and ask questions on an online platform that was

created by the host university prior to the exchange period. Interestingly, they asserted that they used the online page for again practical issues and quick answers instead of establishing a social network with other candidates from other countries. They, on the other hand, felt alarmed, warmer, and relieved toward their upcoming experience upon receiving informative e-mails from the host university about welcoming days including pick-up from airport, orientation activities, international day, and events organized by GET. The host university, therefore, created a more responsible image in participants' mind, so officials at Keele University were thought to be ahead of the ones at the home university in terms of help and empathy issues from the participants' point of view. Considering the attitude differences between the universities, the role of the home university should come under scrutiny in terms of preparing candidates for a short-term study abroad program.

Application for visa was another major concern during the formal preparation. They attached an important meaning to collection of it and did not purchase their flight tickets before obtaining the visa. They even tended to feel as "second class human beings" compared to other European students while completing all the procedures concerning their visa application. The requirement of visa for Turkish candidates indeed caused participants to corroborate their fears of speaking English with native speakers and facing prejudices in the target society.

As a result of such a challenging formal procedure, all three participants developed an attachment to each other and formed group togetherness. They did not have any difficulty in developing a group identity since they all shared similar characteristics and concerns. However, their perceptions often changed regarding the interpretation of the group togetherness. For example, Ece reported that the main reason for her semester decision was, first, her concern for graduation on time; second, the similarity of other two peers who also chose to study abroad during the fall semester. However, for Melek and Nur, although the group togetherness was valuable as they felt supported, they told that it sometimes caused an exaggerated anxiety among them in terms of completing some forms or application to visa. Melek admitted that as a group they sometimes exaggerated the procedures, but she attributed their

anxious deeds to their naiveté and viewed their acts as natural resulting from their lack of experience in completing such formal procedures:

Some online documents are not clear enough to fill them out; we especially have difficulty in understanding some particular points. We sometimes visit them [coordinators] and ask about those specific points. I don't know, perhaps, we could be exaggerating everything. Indeed Mr. Kaya also tries to tell us we are a bit anxious, yes we are, but isn't it normal? (Melek, 2nd Interview)

It was clear that although they might have demanded extra help and questioned every little detail, they expected a certain level of empathy toward their situation.

They also often needed to adjust their plans to stay in line with other peers. For example, Melek and Nur wanted to spend some time in London when they first landed in the UK and before moving to Keele; however, Ece found this idea a bit risky concerning their first days in England; as a result, they gave up the idea of exploring London upon their arrival. In a sense, they acted as a group more than as an individual; however, individual differences and concerns among them also shaped the decisions as a group. Another example was related to their reactions after learning their dorm placements. Ece and Nur felt sorry for leaving Melek as the only Turkish person at another dorm as if she was placed in another planet. This concern might indicate that they might invest some efforts in the target context to maintain group togetherness, which might risk their socialization behaviors.

The most critical part of the formal preparation, however, was the tendency to reduce the whole preparation period to formal aspects thereby ignoring language and cultural preparation. The biggest indicator of this was their instant messaging logs which showed that almost all the interactions had been shaped around formal concerns and there had been almost no mention of a cultural and language preparation. The reason for discussing their group togetherness under this theme was this main focus on the formal aspects of the preparation as a group. Despite reducing the preparation to formal aspects and all the mentioned difficulties, the participants expressed and showed feelings of strong excitement for courses, trips, and dormitory life in the host culture and community. They, therefore, did not ignore the informal

aspects completely, but experienced a period full of uncertainties regarding preparation to their life in England.

4.2.3 A Chaotic and Undervalued Informal Preparation

All three participants at least at one point during the interviews expressed their lack of knowledge and awareness regarding an informal preparation for language and (inter)cultural issues in England; therefore, they had difficulties in articulating an exact strategy or action to prepare for their upcoming intercultural experience. Besides, they always complained about the lack of a systematic and ongoing supervision or guidance in terms of their informal preparation. As mentioned in the previous section, they were also not satisfied with the official support regarding their formal preparation, so in every sense during their preparation period, they were left on their own to prepare for their upcoming complex but promising experiences. They, in a sense, needed to complete the preparation period in a state of chaos.

When asked about the reasons behind their failure to prepare for language and cultural issues, they, first, told that they did not have sufficient time for such informal issues as they had spent most of their time with paperwork and summer school. They indeed wanted to take courses at the home context within the summer school program in order to graduate on time and compensate for the Erasmus period in England. This emphasis placed on graduation concerns in fact helped the researcher to understand what their priorities were, so they viewed the Erasmus program as a CV enhancer and a gate to travelling experiences rather than a program with a plethora of rich intercultural and transformative experiences. Although they attributed their failure at informal preparation to lack of time and excessive paperwork, the main underlying reason was lack of knowledge, awareness, and guidance. Under such a superficial understanding of international exchange programs and unguided process, it was natural for them to reduce preparation to formal aspects.

Of course, they were not totally ignorant of an informal preparation since all three participants implicitly knew that they had to prepare for their experience in order to

overcome their anticipated problems, which are discussed under their future-oriented thought patterns. However, their superficial understanding of the preparation showed variance among them. For example, Melek adopted a tourist lens and explored tourist attractions before living in England; Nur explored British cuisine as a personal concern and expected her intercultural experiences to be a surprise for her; Ece showed some interest in British history and politics but again this was limited to her interest in popular subjects such as the life in the palace or Queen Elizabeth II's life. In fact, it was natural as an international student candidate to have a desire for exploring tourist attractions or explore popular issues around the country, but reducing the whole preparation and intercultural experience to being a tourist involved many risks in terms of intercultural learning and maximizing the benefits of a study abroad program.

Another salient issue among them regarding an informal preparation was a desire to increase familiarity with the British accent. While Ece thought it would be appropriate to watch academic videos for both academic and accent preparation, Melek and Nur thought watching TV series would help them to increase their familiarity with the accent. However, interestingly, they ignored practicing their speaking skills although they were not confident with their English communication skills. Nur's intercultural interactions with Canadian students at the home context, in fact, helped her to ponder upon the intercultural dynamics and her weaknesses in English communication skills, but again, there was no deliberate practice on her side, and the interactions were limited to a short period of time.

Everyone involved in the process reduced preparation to some official work. The participants, however, needed a well-defined cultural and language preparation in order to feel ready and prepared for the challenges about which they would have already been informed. Otherwise, as in the case of Ece and Melek, it was inevitable to feel uneasy toward the end of the preparation period. This negative state, in fact, might not have been caused solely by a lack of preparation. As the upcoming experience also involved a certain level of uncertainty, they might have felt threatened by a new and foreign experience. However, there were no well-structured

attempts on the side of institutions to relieve them even though the host university provided them with a number of brochures to help them consider different aspects of living and studying in England. Furthermore, their attempts were not stimulating enough for participants to consider the complexity of their international experiences since they tended to view those brochures as “book information”. Thus, it could well be said that preparation for Erasmus was mostly reduced to formal preparation, but an informal preparation involving language and culture was also necessary for their cognitive, affective, and behavioral readiness. Their thought patterns regarding intercultural dynamics, which are explored in the next section, could be helpful to predict their actions once in the target society.

4.2.4 Emerging (Inter)cultural Dynamics Involving the Target Culture

The participants’ emerging (inter)cultural understandings throughout the preparation period were treated as one of the main themes and deserved attention because they all experienced unique cultural dynamics. Ece and Melek had experience abroad in the past whereas Nur would go abroad for the first time. Yet, all three of them shared unique perspectives, which showed how cultural issues vary depending on individual differences and can be complex thereby not reducible to a few variables. Moreover, their English language teacher education and candidacy for the Erasmus program in England compounded the interest in their (inter)cultural understandings and their imagined actions in the target society.

First of all, they all viewed themselves as open-minded toward different worldviews; however, they differed in terms of their self-reported national and religious identities. Nur and Melek shared similar understandings and identities in that regard. Both of them defined themselves as “normal Turk and Muslim” and showed some nationalistic, ethnocentric, and essentialist tendencies with regard to their views about the target culture and society. This conservative mindset in fact prevented them from developing an imagined community and seeking an active membership in different communities abroad. They viewed English language as a must skill to acquire for their teaching career and attached no more special meaning to it. Melek, for example, claimed that she consumed some English products such as TV series

and books for fun reasons under the label of *popular culture*. She also wanted to improve her English not because of gaining an access to English-speaking societies but for her language teaching career in Turkey. She simply and firmly stated that she felt close only to the Turkish culture even though she had the knowledge of English language and used it frequently in her teacher education context. Their conservative attachment to what they labelled as “Turkish and Islamic values” might hinder their intercultural experiences in England when combined with their plans for *observing* the culture and becoming a *tourist*.

On the other hand, Ece’s previous experiences abroad helped her to revise her belongingness to different value systems and she ended up with saying “I don’t feel any belonging to anything that has a label”, thus highlighted her ethnorelativistic view of cultures (Bennett, 1993). She indeed felt confident with the integration into the target culture as she trusted her previous international experiences, English knowledge, open-mindedness, and interest in new cultures and languages. She explicitly expressed her intention to participate in local practices and seeking membership in her imagined community since she knew that in order to experience a culture she needed to be a *participant* instead of an *observer* or *tourist*. She, therefore, planned to seek for a membership in different communities in the target society in order to overcome her loneliness and reach the gains that the Erasmus program offered to her. For that purpose, she planned to follow media, politics, and current events, and intended to learn more about their history. She was indeed aware of the some dynamics that keep nations together such as politics, history, and current events (Anderson, 1983) as follows:

I would like to follow the events happening in England. For example, I would like to learn who the prime minister is now, how their parliament works, and how other social bodies function because I imagine that if a foreigner visits our country without the knowledge of our agenda here, s/he will understand nothing. I may also be not knowledgeable enough when I go there, but at least I would like to have a basic knowledge of their life. I would like to explore political and societal issues that take place now in England. (Ece, 3rd Interview)

She, therefore, placed herself as a *legitimate peripheral participant* in the target society and implicitly highlighted the essential features of an imagined community.

These plans and intentions of maintaining the communication with locals actually were good indicators of her intention to socialize with people in the target community. However, seeking for a membership may not guarantee an active participation since the attitude and practices of old-timers in a community of practice are also important (Wenger, 1999); therefore, practices in a community of practice are co-constructed and *mutual engagement* is crucial.

Although they differed in terms of their participation plans in the target society, they all held stereotyped knowledge and opinions toward the life in the UK due to their self-reported lack of knowledge. For example, they told that British people were cold, powerful, hardworking, rich, and perfect. They grounded their stereotypes on their language learning history, teacher education courses, TV series and movies, and word of mouth. Since they held a powerful and homogeneous image of European countries, they might experience some shock when they encounter possible counter-instances in Europe and question their previous stereotyped opinions. However, with a basic introduction to current issues in the UK as part of a preparation program, they might have avoided such shocks and would probably develop a solid and realistic understanding of the life in England before leaving Turkey.

Even though they held stereotyped opinions, they did not close themselves to a cultural preparation, but simply did not know how to prepare, so they held a moderate level of interest in the target culture. In fact, their interest could have been shaped with deliberate preparatory actions at their own department or university, so a chance was missed in terms of preparing teacher candidates for maximizing and optimizing their international experiences with a focus on deep intercultural and global issues thereby raising culturally responsive teachers (Gay, 2010) or promoting global teacherhood (Karaman & Tochon, 2007). Nur, in fact, experienced a short intercultural contact with a group of international students during her preparation period at the home university; as a result, she felt more confident toward her upcoming experience.

On the other hand, although having co-nationals around may help candidates to feel relieved and supported throughout the adaptation process in England, an over-

attachment to each other poses risks in terms of adaptation and participation in a foreign culture; in other words, they might develop in-group favoritism and fail to expand their social networks, thus failing to maximize the benefits of a study abroad program. All participants, in fact, highlighted their withdrawn side and shared the concern for failing to establish a healthy communication with native speakers or any other international students; therefore, they needed to be more proactive in the target context if they wished to reach the benefits. Following all the critical points so far, in the next theme, participants' dynamic and interrelated thought patterns (i.e., motivations, expectations, plans, and concerns) prior to their international experience are explored with a focus on their future-oriented mindset.

4.2.5 Interrelated Future-oriented Dynamic Thought Patterns

Thought patterns (i.e., motivations, expectations, plans, and concerns) regarding the upcoming Erasmus experience were shaped by the complex interplay of dynamic and situated factors, so showed convergences and divergences among short-term international program candidates from one cohort, thereby highlighting the complex nature of human conduct and study abroad programs (Coleman, 2013). To give an example for the complexity of convergences and divergences, Melek reported that she enjoyed an individualistic way of life which was the opposite of Ece's case; however, they were both concerned about their language skills and afraid of the failure in their socialization attempts once in England. Besides, the patterns also interacted with each other in a dynamic way. For example, Ece and Melek expected to be an English language teacher in the future and this expectation influenced their motivations for improving life and English skills during the Erasmus period. This complexity was in fact salient in the lifeworlds of all participants; therefore, the thought patterns that are discussed here are in a dynamic and complex relationship with each other and broadly with the participants' decision-making, preparation, and imagination. Keeping this nonlinear systemic phenomenon in mind, their future-oriented thought patterns are discussed one by one in the rest of this section.

4.2.5.1 Motivations

In terms of the main motives behind their decision to participate in the Erasmus program, participants shared similar thought patterns. Their main motivations were improving their English communication skills, enhancing their CVs, and travelling across the UK and EU. However, the emotional meaning that was ascribed to the destination choice differed among participants. While Nur was a fan of the UK, Ece regarded it as the best option for her language teaching career, but, as told before, their main motivations did not vary significantly. The interesting point regarding their motivations was the desired balance between their academic studies and adventure when in England; that is to say, they attached an importance to their courses at the host university, but they also tended to take “easy” ones so that they could allocate sufficient time for their fun and adventure motivations. To provide a clarification, their understanding of fun and adventure was shaped around their travelling plans; in a sense, they sought for a balance between their courses and travelling. However, the degree of their motivation showed variance in terms of the participation in the target culture; Melek and Nur was motivated to be a tourist while Ece wanted to explore the culture as much as possible as a participator. This issue of participation was discussed in detail under intercultural dynamics; nevertheless, there is a further elaboration in the next sub-section that is allocated for their expectations from the program.

4.2.5.2 Expectations

These participants held a number of expectations in order to keep themselves on the track while following their motivations or goals. First of all, they expected a welcoming and tolerating attitude from the target society as opposed to the current self-reported polarized status of Turkey; thus, they had fears for prejudices toward their background. As for their socialization efforts, they viewed dorm, classes, and trips as potential socialization spaces. Ece particularly expected to make new friends in the classroom environment, but she also viewed travelling as an opportunity to meet new people. Melek similarly expected a more student-centered education system in England, perhaps the reason behind was her socialization and

communication expectations. However, regarding their communication expectations, they tended to expect local people to approach them for communication since they thought they were not outgoing enough to make new friends easily, but they all reported that they would try to be more self-initiated in that regard once they are in England.

Their expectations in fact implied how the attitude of the old-timers in the communities of practice might affect the actions of the newcomers. So, in a sense, they expected old-timers in the host context to help them concerning culture shock, adaptation, and socialization. However, the problem with Melek and Nur was that they did not position themselves as *legitimate peripheral participants* because they chose to *observe* instead of locating themselves as *newcomers*. In any case, local people were desired to show a welcoming and tolerating attitude to them. A strong dependence on external factors and limiting their social connection to certain spaces might actually hinder their learning experiences. They, therefore, needed to think certain strategies to start and maintain a genuine conversation with people in England since they did not have a certain plan to handle communication breakdowns or to recognize the dynamics involved in intercultural communication. Rather, they expected an enormous uncertainty for their experiences in England and avoided developing certain strategies for the anticipated issues or problems. Even worse, Nur did not expect to undergo a major identity transformation since her parents had concerns about a radical change in her personality; therefore, she developed a subconscious shield toward deep transformative intercultural exchanges.

If everything went according to their expectations, they believed that they would expand their social networks, improve their English language and intercultural skills thereby becoming an English language teacher candidate with high self-confidence, fluent English, and interesting international experiences to share with their future students. They also thought they would encourage their students to go abroad and would increase their motivation and interest in learning English. Moreover, they believed they would be a bridge between countries and cultures by being familiar with the British accent and culture, which would also help their future language

learners. In the long run, they expected to be valued by the employers with the help of an added value of the Erasmus program to their CV. In fact, their motivations and expectations could be understood better with the help of their plans and concerns that are discussed in the rest of this theme.

4.2.5.3 Plans

Their plans were different for different periods of their international experiences. The plans differed depending on the pre-, while-, and post-Erasmus periods. As for their plans before living in England, they planned to improve their familiarity with the British accent and where to visit in England. Compared to other two peers, Ece had more interest in learning about culture and history of the UK prior to her departure. However, she admitted that she failed to realize most of her plans that she had made for the period prior to the Erasmus program. She gave the reasons for this failure as the busy schedule during her summer school and excessive paperwork during the formal preparation. This failure was indeed valid for all of them. They, therefore, clearly needed systematic steps of preparation organized by professionals; otherwise, they could even fail to realize some of their simplest plans. This critical issue in fact should unsettle the officials who are expected to prepare candidates for the experience since they usually tended to prepare the candidates only for formal procedures. Such cases of partial and unclear preparation may risk the outcomes for the candidates as they may fail to realize their goals or even may fail setting realistic goals.

As for their plans for the exchange period, they all wanted and planned to be more outgoing and self-initiated, thus expanding their social networks in England and improving their English communication and intercultural skills. Interestingly, they did not plan acquiring a British accent; instead, they wanted to explore unique aspects of the accent as prospective language teachers; they, in a sense, viewed the allocated time period as insufficient and unrealistic to acquire an accent. They also planned to travel across the UK and did not plan to spend much time at “party hard” settings. Their travel plans were actually shaped around the touristic face of the UK; thus, they wanted to visit popular attractions. Another interesting point was that

Melek and Nur did not plan to follow local life or news instead chose to be an observer in contrast to Ece's plans.

Regarding the new educational setting, they planned to pass the courses with the minimum required criteria as they wanted to spend a considerable amount of time on fun and adventure, so it could well be said that their plans were in line with their motivations for the Erasmus program in England. However, Ece anticipated that she would do her best to meet course requirements even though it would be enough to meet only minimum passing criteria, thus highlighting individual differences in a study abroad program again. Nevertheless, they did not reduce such a valuable program to exploring "night life" in England as they thought that people mostly chose to participate in the Erasmus program for fun reasons. However, they were not assured by their home university prior to their experience concerning the credit recognition for the courses that they would take at the host university; therefore, they were still concerned about prolonging graduation. Ece was the most concerned candidate in that regard and tended to attach an exaggerated meaning to her graduation on time even though she was an enthusiastic candidate in terms of exploring a new culture. Lastly, their plans for the exchange period were also directed by their future post-Erasmus and graduation plans. All of them wanted to be valued on the job market as a result of their international experience, so they planned to focus on the gains that would be beneficial for them during job seeking process.

4.2.5.4 Concerns and Fears

In addition to the sojourn plans, these prospective teachers had concerns and fears related to their upcoming experience. They listed their main concerns as their insufficient survival skills, low confidence in their English speaking skills, spending most of their time in the Turkish peer circle, failing to understand the British accent, fear of speaking English with native speakers, prejudices toward Turkey or Turkish people, a different educational system with native classmates, adaptation, and financial problems. Particularly, they were concerned about their social skills and were afraid of not being able to integrate into the target culture. The salient and central one among all these concerns was the possibility of a failure in realizing their

sojourn plans or goals, and this was heavily grounded on their self-reported low English communication and social skills. One of the major factors behind their socialization fears was also an implicit fear of speaking English with native speakers.

All participants shared the same concern about failing to understand native speakers due to their British accent and failing to express themselves in English both due to their communicative incompetence and fear of speaking with them. Their concern was understandable to some extent due to their self-reported low skills in second language communication; however, Nur concentrated too much on native speakers' possible opinions and attitudes toward her English. For example, she thought that native speakers would definitely "judge" her English and might question her existence in their country. Once she even told that she could handle daily conversations but it would be a nightmare for her to deliver a presentation in front of native speakers as part of her course requirements. She simply complicated the intercultural encounters for herself with potentially harmful presuppositions. Interestingly, Ece told that she might be more confident with talking to international students who would share the same status with her; therefore, she implicitly placed native speakers at a higher and more powerful status than her. Ece, moreover, expected GET to organize sufficient number of social events so that they could expand their social networks; otherwise, she thought she might fail to meet new *international* people, thereby highlighting her desire to socialize with international students who would share the same status as her. This self-reported power status between them and native speakers might shape both the quality and quantity of their interactions in a negative way.

Since they also called themselves as prospective English language teachers, they might have felt an extra pressure on them resulting from high expectations for their foreign language skills. They, therefore, needed to think new ways of constructing nonnative teacher or speaker identities with which it could be possible to tolerate their own mistakes, learn from their mistakes, and develop their English skills; otherwise, they might adopt passive roles and avoid using language to hide their so called undesired deficiencies. This is, in fact, a red flag for language teacher

educators and international education professionals. Since they were not only fun-oriented but also valued academic opportunities and sometimes developed an interest in the target culture during preparation the period, their motivations could have been reinforced with a well-designed intercultural communication training that is grounded in solid theoretical and practical foundations. Following all the five complex and interrelated main themes in this study, which are illustrated on a relational map in Figure 3 below, a number of critical issues emerged concerning the literature on decision-making and preparation for short-term international programs, active participation in the study abroad contexts, and the need for preparing candidates for study abroad experiences, which are discussed in the next and final chapter.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Presentation

This in-depth phenomenological qualitative study aimed to unpack Turkish prospective English language teachers' preparation experiences prior to their Erasmus exchange period in England so as to reveal the multi-dimensions of the period prior to their short-term international experience. The impetus behind this research effort was a common warning in the literature that students' preparation experiences and mindset prior to an international program might significantly influence the outcomes (Coleman, 1998; Dekaney, 2008, Jacobone & Moro, 2014; Tarp, 2006; Teichler, 2004). Following the investigation and interpretation of the findings, this study clearly supported the standpoint in the literature that viewed (pre)international experiences as highly complex and individual (Coleman, 2013; Kinginger, 2015). In order to picture this complex nature of international experiences, three distinctive and intriguing cases prior to the Erasmus exchange program were embraced in this study: Nur, who has never been abroad before and was the most excited one with a conservative attitude; Melek, who was born abroad but had more nationalistic tendencies; Ece, who had short-term travels to Europe and had a more ethnorelative mindset compared to others.

Even though this study at hand only focused on the period prior to the Erasmus experience, the in-depth analyses of the three Turkish candidates' experiences confirmed how each individual candidate underwent complex and dynamic decision-making and preparation period due to different past experiences, identity construction, and thought patterns. This unique cohort, therefore, supported the arguments of Coleman (2013) as he claimed that there should not be efforts to claim generalizations regarding study abroad experiences but instead the aim should be to explore individuality, complexity, and variation and to look for major patterns among

all these complex entities. Kinginger (2015) also underscored the significant role of individual differences and different past experiences on intercultural experiences and viewed identity as dynamic, fluid, dialogic, and multiple (Norton, 2000). The researcher, therefore, focused on the whole people and whole lives (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001; Coleman, 2013) throughout the research process instead of viewing participants as just language learners and teacher candidates, thereby respected the individual histories and complex and fluid identities.

On the other hand, since the *quality* concern of the qualitative research did not permit findings to be generalizable to larger populations, this interpretative phenomenological study strived to reveal the complexities surrounding the preparation experiences which may resonate in different contexts. The readers, therefore, should evaluate this study in terms of theoretical transferability rather than empirical generalizability; in this way, the readers may establish a connection between the analysis in the study and their own personal and professional experiences (Smith et al., 2009).

Keeping the issues of complexity, variation, and transferability in mind, the findings of this study are discussed around the literature on decision-making and preparation for short-term international exchange programs, active participation in the study abroad contexts, and need for preparing short-term international exchange candidates, so, in that regard, the main discussion themes in this chapter are *decision-making and preparation for short-term international exchange programs and fostering intercultural competence, language use, and active participation in the study abroad contexts*. As the participants of the present study were prospective English language teachers, the discussions are oftentimes connected to the scholarly debated issues in teacher education literature. Following the discussion of the findings, a number of critical conclusions are made. Lastly, a number of recommendations for further research and practice are presented.

5.1 Discussion

5.1.1 Decision-making and Preparation for Short-term International Exchange Programs

In a supportive vein to recent study abroad findings (e.g., Coleman, 2013; Jackson, 2010; Kinginger, 2015; Lesjak et al., 2015; Trent, 2011; Van Mol & Timmerman, 2014), the participants' decision-making process was shown to be influenced by different individual and situated factors, so it was not easy to present a linear and convergent map for their decision-making process due to the highly individual and complex nature of the expectations from the Erasmus program (Lesjak et al., 2015). However, a number of major patterns regarding their decision-making emerged through an extensive data collection process and active involvement in participants' lifeworlds. Overall, positive and popular image of the Erasmus program and England, good memories (i.e., travelling and socialization experiences) of previous exchange students, desire to improve English language and life skills, possibility of enhancing career opportunities, and supportive attitude from their social networks mainly influenced their decision to apply for the Erasmus program.

The main factors behind their decision-making naturally formed their motivations and goals for the program. The most essential and prominent factor was their recognition of the *linguistic capital* of English (Bourdieu, 1991); that is to say, they were convinced that fluency in the language was essential to gain access to *symbolic and material resources* in their home communities. They, therefore, ascribed a paramount importance to the development of their English language skills, particularly to their oral communication skills; in this way, they believed that they would increase their employability chances and their visibility among the other non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) in Turkey, thereby highlighting economic benefits of the program over cultural and social factors.

The hopeful attitude toward increased job prospects is indeed a common one among Turkish candidates both before and after the study abroad programs since it is explicitly voiced in other studies conducted by Brown and Aktas (2011, 2012) and Aydin (2012), too. However, interestingly, Brown and Aktas (2011) found that

Turkish students were more interested in the touristic aspects of the Erasmus program rather than fully benefiting from the educational and intercultural possibilities, so the perception toward increased job prospects was not backed up with concrete goals or plans in a similar vein to the findings in this study. In fact, they have reasonable causes in thinking that their job prospects would increase after their international experience because employers in developing countries tend to hire people with international experiences (Franklin, 2010; Teichler & Janson, 2007). However, participants need to engage in communication with local people and international students to improve their language and intercultural skills, particularly if they desire an improvement in their English-speaking skills; otherwise, a study abroad experience does not turn into benefits automatically (Isabelli-Garcia, 2006).

Participants' decision-making process was not only shaped by their motivations, but also involved other people. In this study, family members did not force participants to apply for the program but adopted a supportive role, thus respected participants' agency over their decisions. Their decision was also influenced by the peers who moved in the previous years (Gonzalez et al., 2011). Moreover, they sought the advice of other people both through face-to-face conversations and internet searches (Gonzalez et al., 2011; Maria Cubillo et al., 2006; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). However, there was no explicit report for the influence of teacher educators or the teacher education curriculum on their decision-making, which may imply an underestimation of the internationalization or intercultural issues at that particular teacher education context.

Regarding participants' destination choice, they made it based on the country's popularity, prestige, language and travelling opportunities, thus supported again the existing literature in terms of subtly prioritizing instrumental reasons (e.g., Brown & Aktas, 2011, 2012; Forsey et al., 2011; Jacobone & Moro, 2014; Lesjak et al., 2015). As discussed under their motivations, they focused broadly on the prestigious impact of an international experience in an English-speaking country on their career and did not generate clear academic goals in contrast to their travelling plans. However, the emphasis on the *fun and adventure* part of the Erasmus should not be misinterpreted

because students may still benefit from spending a considerable time in an international context and may develop an international mindset (Juvan & Lesjak, 2011; Lesjak et al., 2015), but the utmost aim still should be both maximization and optimization of the sociocultural experiences abroad.

The participants' decision-making and destination choice process indeed show similarities to the process depicted by Maringe and Carter (2007) in which they contend that people who have the intention to study abroad are under influence of different forces; they, first, feel the impact of society, culture and politics they live with, then they recognize the impact of close factors such as teachers, family, peers, and media. Third, they recognize their self-construal with a personal history. The interplay of all these factors shapes the decision to or not to study abroad through a subjective filter. Of course all these factors find their unique place in different situational contexts and may not follow a linear order; therefore it could be both a subconscious and conscious process (Maringe & Carter, 2007). In this complex network of factors during the decision-making process, deterministic views of decision-making processes for international programs such as push-pull framework (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) may not satisfactorily explain the complex and nonlinear relationship among the factors. Moreover, the pulling or pushing factors were even not clear because participants sometimes hesitated due to a risk of prolonging their undergraduate studies or they were not fully aware of the prospects of the program; they rather tended to think it simply as a richness during their language teacher education and also a period with full of fun and adventure; therefore, the complex interplay of factors challenged the existing deterministic decision-making frameworks and highlighted the individuality, complexity, and variation in short-term international credit mobility programs (Coleman, 2013).

On the other hand, participants had to cope with their emerging concerns both during their decision-making and preparation period. Their main concern during the period following their decision-making was to take the right steps so as not to prolong graduation. This haunting uncertainty around credit recognition and administrative burden is in fact one of the main concerns that study abroad candidates have to deal

with across different contexts (Vossensteyn et al., 2010); that's why, they complained about insufficient help that they received from both institutions in terms of selecting the right courses in order to obtain desired credit recognition. Indeed they were not satisfied with the help and support that was provided by the home university regarding both their formal and informal preparation, thereby confirming the study conducted by Doyle et al. (2010) which showed that study abroad participants were obliged to do their own search regarding visa, credit weighting, language and culture, and received little help prior to departure. Thus, the issue of *loneliness* during preparation to study abroad programs still seems to be a prevalent issue across different country contexts.

Another main concern that was observed among the candidates was the financial constraints and high cost of living in England (Brown & Holloway, 2008). Since they were required to cover the expenses for visa, accommodation, flight tickets, and had to allocate a certain amount of budget for their daily life in England, they thought the provided grant was simply insufficient, even covering only their accommodation expenses. This financial barrier is indeed one of the main constraints for participation in the Erasmus program (Aba, 2013; Vossensteyn et al., 2010), so this issue still remains as a challenge for Turkish higher education in terms of internationalization and student mobility. There is, therefore, a need for increase in funds or grants allocated for student and staff mobility.

Regarding the *fears* peculiar to Turkish candidates, Brown and Aktas (2011, 2012) provided the most comprehensive picture in the literature. Their participants reported a high level of anxiety prior to their departure that was caused by their concerns about accommodation, language skills, socialization, and food. In this study, accommodation and food were not a significant source of anxiety, but the fears toward language skills and socialization were high even if the candidates were prospective English language teachers. Brown and Aktas (2011) also found that the participants were concerned about Turkish and Muslim identity since they were uneasy about possible negative judgments of Turkish society in European countries. Indeed, the same fear is expressed in other studies conducted with Turkish students

and most of them reported a bias toward their culture and Turkish-Muslim identity after completing their international experience (Aydin, 2012; Ersoy, 2013; Kizilaslan, 2010). Turkish participants, therefore, tend to feel a threat to their national and religious identities due to the tensions between possibly differing religious views and moral values; as a result, they may build walls around themselves due to the self-perception of hostility toward them (Benson, Barkhuizen, Bodycott, & Brown, 2012). However, one caveat in that regard is that the previous Turkish participants might have interpreted the environment with selective bias, which means that they corroborated their pre-established assumptions through selecting the only supporting stimuli. The similar intercultural worries or assumptions that emerged from the findings of this study are discussed in the next section in detail around the issues of active participation in the target context, but before that, it is critical to discuss the dominance of formal aspects on the preparation of the participants.

Participants in this study mainly dealt with the formal procedures, thus neglected the role and importance of an informal preparation (i.e., language and culture) over the quality of their upcoming experience. The most remarkable examples of that reduction were their interactions with a Turkish exchange student who was already in the target context and interactions with one another through an online instant messaging application. During all those interactions with each other and with other people, the participants reduced the preparation to formal elements such as completing paperwork, obtaining visa, and arranging accommodation, so they did not place much importance on discussing deeper issues such as culture, language, history, politics, and daily life in England. However, it is not reasonable to expect them to do their own research and preparation all alone in a state of naiveté, so they needed a systematic supervision or guidance throughout their preparation period. Otherwise, from time to time, they complained about insufficient preparation time and lack of effective strategies to prepare for the life in England, so they mostly had to deal with official procedures such as passport, visa, accommodation, and learning agreement.

Since they reduced the whole preparation period to formal aspects and reported their loneliness during the period, it was confirmed that they were just encouraged with plain promise of *many gains*. Therefore, universities still may fail to identify and share concrete outcomes in terms of international programs but they try to promote participation (Forsey et al., 2011). Thus, sending universities need to “do more than create the opportunity for study abroad (Forsey et al., 2011, p. 137), which undoubtedly requires greater sources. As a result, a need for preparing future candidates emerged from this study. The details about a possible preparation program are discussed in the upcoming section, and further recommendations are made in the recommendations section in line with the main discussion points that are grappled with here. So, overall, it can well be said that resolving all formal procedures does not mean that the participants will not have any difficulty in England, but are they ready to face all the predicted challenges in a new foreign environment?

5.1.2 Fostering Intercultural Competence, Language Use, and Active Participation in the Target Context

Recruiting students for the Erasmus program through systematic steps and exposing them to an international and foreign environment may not be sufficient to maintain the quality and ensure the gains of the program particularly regarding language and cultural learning (Cushner & Chang, 2015; Van Hoof & Verbeeten, 2005).

Moreover, an international experience involves not only linguistic issues but also sociocultural and intercultural elements (Coleman, 1998). Therefore, possessing a certain level of proficiency in the English language, which is the case for the participants in this study, does not promise rich intercultural experiences although it could play a crucial role for active human agency in an English-speaking country (Sawir et al., 2012). The duration of the exchange period also matters; the longer it is, the more optimal the benefits are (Dwyer, 2004).

A 4-month-period, as in the case of this study, is seen sufficient to benefit from a study abroad program (Dwyer, 2004); however, it is not the duration but a well-planned and guided program that results in a number of benefits for international

students (Goldoni, 2013; Jackson, 2008). The key point, therefore, is to prepare international students and also ensure an ongoing supervision throughout the sojourn period. This necessity has indeed been highlighted in a number of studies so far. In those studies, participants thought that their experience would have been a lot more productive if they had been trained prior to the experience (Barkhuizen & Feryok, 2006; Yang, 2011) or researchers from both Turkish and other international contexts strived to keep the idea of preparation on the agenda (e.g., Allen & Dupuy, 2013; Byram & Dervin, 2008; Goldoni, 2013; Jackson, 2008; Kizilaslan 2010; Marx & Moss, 2011; Pence & Macgillivray, 2008; Yildirim & Ilin, 2013). Coleman (1998) similarly argued that international students might hold stereotypes before living in the target context and they might reinforce those stereotypes through a selective bias. Jackson (2010), therefore, attached a paramount importance to the disclosure of preconceptions so that authorities could identify the risks and could develop solid ways to handle them. Otherwise, as Aydin (2012) revealed, most of the exchange students tend to experience significant difficulties in establishing communication with the local community, thereby failing to reach the benefits or minimizing the benefits.

Through a preparation program short-term international exchange students can maximize their intercultural experiences and enrich their intercultural understanding and foreign language competencies, so they should not be viewed as tourists but as sojourners. With a hopeful attitude toward the upcoming Erasmus experience, the researcher preferred to use the word *sojourner* to describe the participants in this study instead of using *long-term tourists*. Otherwise, the program could be considered as a “sponsored vacation” as described by Juvan and Lesjak (2011). In fact, some potential risks in terms of a sponsored vacation emerged from this study since two of the participants adopted a tourist mindset; all of them expressed a fear of speaking English with native speakers; and they all developed a strong attachment to each other, which implied a risk in terms of in-group favoritism; therefore, a preparation program covering language, cultural, personal, and professional issues could have been helpful for the participants in this study.

With the help of a preparation program, the chances for increasing language and cultural learning would be higher in the target context, thus would increase the ways for the participants to become interculturally competent teachers. Such intercultural efforts are important since English language teacher education programs in Turkey are criticized for their failure in preparing (inter)culturally competent language teachers (Atay, 2005; Hatipoglu, 2012). Since the participants were unable to share deep reflections on *culture* and admitted holding stereotypes about the target culture or society, this study also clearly showed how cultural issues are ruled out in language teacher education curriculum or practices in Turkey. Therefore, a number of recommendations regarding the content and function of a possible preparation program have been made under the section that has been reserved for recommendations for future practices.

The utmost aim in preparing candidates for an international experience is to ensure their active participation in local communities of practice; otherwise, they may fail to enhance their foreign language skills and to develop as interculturally competent teachers. (Allen, 2010a; Jackson, 2008; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004). Therefore, participants should be encouraged not to resist their positioning in a new sociocultural setting (Jackson, 2008; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Trentman, 2013) and to embrace the opportunities so as to cultivate an ethnorelative mindset (Bennett, 1993). However, other participants tended to mind obstacles and rejections; therefore, demonstrated a more passive and resistant role. As a result, they reduced the linguistic and cultural opportunities, thus failed to maximize and optimize experiences in a new cultural setting. Similarly, in another study, teacher candidates from different disciplines who completed their Erasmus program owed most of the gains to their personal efforts and active participation (Unlu, 2015).

Considering the significant impact of active participation on the gains of study abroad programs, this study aimed to uncover *imagined communities of practice*, predicted participation in those communities, and openness to experiencing a new sociocultural setting from the participants' perspectives and narratives. While interpreting the findings, the researcher benefited from a number of sociocultural

theoretical frameworks that are situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), communities of practice (Wenger, 1999), and imagined communities (Anderson, 1983; Norton, 2001). Investigating imagined communities of language learners is indeed legitimated by influential researchers in the field to understand language learners' investment in both present and future practices in different sociocultural settings (Norton, 2001; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007; Ryan, 2006). The main understanding of imagined communities in language learning research is that language learners may feel connected to communities in which they have never been through the language they learn (Gao, 2012; Kanno & Norton, 2003). However, not all language learners imagine the same community since the process is also shaped by their own national identity and perception of global developments (Gao, 2012).

As a result of the interpretative journey in this study, a number of risk factors that may hinder legitimate positioning of the participants and learning opportunities in the target context or in their imagined communities emerged based on the personal histories and thought-patterns of the participants. In their imagined communities, even if they are in a state of *imagination* prior to their real *encounter*, they developed different modes of belonging and participation plans; Nur and Melek located themselves at the margins without promising full participation whereas Ece aimed a legitimate peripheral participation and moving toward the center of the activities even though Ece was also concerned about her withdrawn side and English communication skills (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001). As for Melek's case, she noted that her fluency in English was not at a sufficient level, so she was a bit reluctant to communicate with native speakers due to the language gap between her and native speakers. She instead preferred to observe the target society, thus neglected looking for ways to communicate. Furthermore, she chose to adhere to her Turkish identity; however, this distancing and *observer* attitude may not help her to maximize and optimize her learning throughout the exchange period. Nur was also mostly interested in tourist attractions and travelling opportunities in the UK. Most of her "exciting" plans were mostly reserved for those non-participative intentions, thus

implying an undervaluation of experiencing societal dynamics such as daily life and routines, traditions, youth life, education, history, political system, and so on.

Being a tourist or observer may not help Nur and Melek to gain a legitimate position and optimize their intercultural experiences. Through a preparation program, a strong interest in travelling opportunities could be turned into a medium for social connections and experiences regarding maximization of the cultural and language learning in the target context (Cushner, 2007). Needless to say, they cannot be forced to become a member of imagined communities of native speakers, but they need to develop effective communication strategies and ICC to maintain communication with people from English-speaking or any other different cultures instead of adhering to national values, which necessitates a broader understanding of L2 socialization in order to be positioned or accepted as a legitimate peripheral participant (Trentman, 2013; Wang, 2010). In that regard, Ece was relatively more willing to take an active role in the target society since she explicitly planned to share the practices in the local community and improve her intercultural competence that was significantly shaped by her previous international experiences.

The willingness shown by the host people in the target community of practice is also critical because a rejection by these people may cause participants who plan to achieve a newcomer status or meet new people to give up their integration efforts (Allen, 2010b). This indeed charges native speakers or target community members with crucial responsibilities to build democratic and egalitarian environments for international students (Morita, 2004). Therefore, communities of practice require their participants to perform mutual engagement (Wenger, 1999). To exemplify this concept of mutual engagement, Wenger (1999) states that a fish in its aquarium in the house does not participate in a family whereas the case of the family dog is a bit different as it shows a peripheral participation with the family members; therefore, participation involves the whole person and other members in the community, thus is a complex process (Wenger, 1999). In Ortactepe's (2013) study, a Turkish doctoral student in the US suffered from homesickness and complained about gaining access to native speaker communities due to the lack of meaningful communication with

them; that's why, he looked for more cultural similarities and the same international student status with the people he wanted socialize with. He also reported avoidance on the side of native speakers in terms of interaction with nonnative speakers. This intriguing case implies that language learning process or socialization in a target culture or society is shaped not only by the learner's motivation and agency but also willingness of the target society to share the practices and locate newcomers as legitimate participants, so it is a mutually constituted relationship. High motivation is not, therefore, the only factor to gain access to native speaker communities because a variety of social and affective factors are involved in a study abroad experience (Ortactepe, 2013).

The mutuality between old-timers and newcomers may contain power relations in itself as in the imagination of my participants who placed native speakers at a higher and more powerful position, so they developed a fear of speaking English with native speakers partly due to their self-reported insufficient English communication skills. In fact, having a limited English proficiency and placing native speakers or old-timers at a higher and more advantageous status could have a debilitating impact on the sojourn gains and participation in different sociocultural communities; therefore, the participants may fail to have an access to their imagined communities and reduce the number of opportunities for improvement (Morita, 2004; Norton, 2001; Pavlenko, 2003; Wang, 2010). Although language learners or NNESTs are encouraged to reject the standards of native speaker competency and accept themselves as multicompetent speakers/bilinguals (Cook, 1999; Park, 2012; Rudolph, Selvi, & Yazan, 2015), a serious problem emerges when language learners view themselves as "second class human beings" and place gatekeepers at a higher status because of their relatively lower English-speaking skills and tough visa procedures. Even though Ortactepe (2015) and Rudolph et al. (2015) criticized the obscurity of the *native-nonnative speaker dichotomy*, participants of the present study clearly positioned themselves as non-natives and subtly perceived themselves as inferior; thus, a fear of speaking with native speakers emerged during their preparation period. They, in a sense, reproduced a native-nonnative discourse which

is a matter of ongoing debate in the field of TESOL (Rudolph et al., 2015). Thus, overall, the participants may avoid seeking membership in new communities of practice abroad due to their unwillingness to participate or a potential rejection by the old-timers, self-perceived low English-speaking skills, and strong national ties although they differed depending on their individual and complex lifeworlds.

Another risk factor in this study regarding the active participation in target communities of practice is the strong attachment to the peers or co-nationals prior to the Erasmus experience. As all three of them completed all the formal stages together, participants naturally developed a strong bond to each other. They even often needed to suspend their personal goals as in the case of whether to visit London just after the arrival or not, thereby implying a *group self* (Ellemers, 2012) through which members of a group may set aside their personal preferences and follow the group's goals. This study does not claim that sojourners should only spend time with local people and ignore people from their own country. They may need them during their adaptation process but if they choose to spend the whole period together, then the cultural and linguistic gains are minimized because participating in different local or international communities at the target context, maintaining weaker ties with home country and stronger ties with locals, facing intercultural challenges, and overcoming adaptation problems are likely to increase chances of establishing strong social networks in the target culture and increase linguistic and intercultural gains (Brown & Holloway, 2008; Dewey, Belnap & Hillstrom, 2013; Isabelli-Garcia, 2006; Magnan & Back, 2007; Sawir, Marginson, Deumert, Nyland, & Ramia, 2008). Therefore, they need to relate to different social groups such as international students, local people, and peers from the same country of origin. Closing themselves only to co-nationals would enhance their ethnocentrism and they would judge other cultures based on their own cultural norms (Karaman & Tochon, 2007, 2010).

5.2 Conclusions

This interpretative phenomenological study addressed the research gap in the field of English language teacher education in Turkey regarding prospective language teachers' short-term or temporary study abroad experiences. Since the existing

literature mostly focused on the outcomes of study abroad programs, this study chose to investigate the lived experiences from the decision-making process to the final day at home context through an in-depth interpretative qualitative lens. Through exploring the multi-dimensions involved in the preparation experiences, the study aimed to uncover critical issues that might have a remarkable impact on the exchange period. Therefore, it aimed to reveal critical barriers to the maximization and optimization of short-term international experiences, thereby increasing awareness and efforts for improving intercultural competence, English language proficiency, life skills, understanding of different educational systems, and global teacherhood. Overall it was of paramount importance to understand participants' lived experiences and thought patterns (i.e., motivations, plans, expectations, and concerns) in order to both comprehend their preparation dynamics and to predict their active participation in the target society.

Following an analysis of collected data and active involvement in participants' lifeworlds, the researcher, first of all, confirmed the recent discussions that have highlighted complex and individual nature of study abroad programs (Coleman, 2013) since the participants' experiences were shaped around their complex, dialogic, dynamic, and evolving lifeworlds from the application day till the departure (Dervin, 2011). Due to their complex and individual lifeworlds, synthesizing major patterns regarding their decision-making and preparation experiences necessitated thick case descriptions and in-depth interpretative endeavors so as to end up with a number of superordinate themes that elaborated convergences and divergences among the participants. After such a phenomenological rigor, three major conclusions are made as follows.

First, the most prominent factors in the participants' complex and dynamic decision-making process were their motivations and expectations for the Erasmus program. They were mainly motivated by the market value of the Erasmus program, the prestige of England on their future career, and travelling opportunities. They, therefore, thought that spending a considerable amount of time in a prestigious English-speaking country would enable them to improve their English

communication skills dramatically and would help them to climb career ladders fast in their home country. They at the same time would have fun and adventure through travelling experiences. Such a reductionist attitude toward the upcoming international experience prevented them from grasping the essence of rich transformative international experiences. However, there was no systematic guidance or supervision which might have helped them to come to realize complexities and different gains of short-term international experiences.

Second, the participants had to allocate most of their available time and resources to the formal preparation period which involved excessive paperwork and strict visa procedures. Since they were also left on their own for most of the preparation period, they lacked awareness toward informal aspects of their preparation, thus reduced their preparation to formal aspects. Third, since they lacked awareness toward the informal issues such as culture and language, they tended to have stereotyped knowledge and attitude toward the host country and society. Even worse, they developed a fear of speaking English with native speakers. However, they differed in terms of their participation plans in the target context: two of them planned to be observers or tourists whereas one participant planned to seek a membership in her imagined community with the help of her active participation in local practices and naturally expected an inclusive attitude from the old-timers. Following all these critical conclusions and differing plans of active participation, a major need for an intercultural preparation program emerged due to their stereotyped knowledge, fear of speaking English with native speakers, tendency to emphasize travelling over intercultural contacts, their lack of awareness toward adaptation to a foreign environment, and the role of language use in the target context and in expanding social networks. This need of preparing candidates is elaborated in the next section; furthermore, a number of other recommendations are made for further practice and research in the next and last section in this study.

5.3 Recommendations

The findings of this study mainly revealed that the participants reduced their preparation efforts to formal issues such as paperwork and visa procedures and

tended to neglect informal issues such as language and cultural preparation. They also explicitly stated their dissatisfaction with the help and support that they received from the home institution. Moreover, they lacked a solid cultural understanding and demonstrated a number of critical risks that may endanger their active participation in the target context and may hinder their learning opportunities. Following the discussions on those risk factors and their preparation experiences in the previous sections, a number of recommendations are made here for both future practices and further research.

5.3.1 Recommendations for Future Practices

1. During the application period for the Erasmus program, participants should be informed about different options and unique benefits of each university option. Otherwise, as in the case of this study, they tend to rank their choices with respect to the country's popularity, prestige, and travelling opportunities. Also, presentation of particular countries through media, tourist information, word of mouth, and literature should be critically evaluated by the candidates in order to prevent a disparity between reality and expectations, so relying only on the prestigious image of a country and word of mouth may not be healthy attitude toward the preparation for that particular country. (Beech, 2014; Santoro, 2014)
2. Participants mostly were unable to elaborate on their goals and how they were going to achieve them, so supervisors are recommended to help the candidates with their goals and plans (Allen, 2010) since participants with realistic and achievable expectations may cope well with adaptation problems and be more active and motivated (Jackson, 2008).
3. The participants often complained about excessive paperwork that they had to complete in order to obtain visa for the entrance to the UK. This "strict" process sometimes caused them to feel like "second class human beings" compared to other Erasmus candidates from different European contexts. For the future Erasmus exchange practices, candidates may feel more welcomed into the European communities if they are confronted with less strict visa procedures with less number of documents.

4. Both home and host universities should provide Erasmus candidates with clear course catalogues for available courses at the host university and their equivalent courses at the home university. If such a systematic course selection and credit recognition process is not possible, the home university should relieve the candidates by offering a list of available courses that they can ask for replacement upon their return based on the courses that the candidates plan to take.
5. An increased financial support may enhance the quality and mobility of the Erasmus program (Gonzalez et al., 2011; Vossensteyn et al., 2010) since the participants in this study simply perceived the allocated grant as insufficient even for their basic expenses (e.g., accommodation, flight tickets, health insurance, and visa application).
6. Intercultural and language learning may not occur merely by exposing participants to an international context (Cushner & Chang, 2015); therefore, a need for an extensive orientation or preparation program -if possible in cooperation with the host university- emerged from the findings of this study. In that regard, a preparation program including theoretical issues, discussions, reflections, and assignments on intercultural contacts and communication could be helpful for sojourners to increase the likelihood of their intercultural and language learning. This program may also include "...a foundation of geography, history, language, cultures, beliefs, and customs of the host country" (Roberts, 2007, p. 22). Moreover, the international status of English as a lingua franca could be explored with the candidates through a focus on native-nonnative interactions which possibly involve power relations, communication breakdowns, and fear of speaking English with native speakers. These preparations should not only take place before the experience but students should also be monitored and guided throughout their experience (Roberts, 2007). The professionals involved in such preparation programs should have specialization in internationalization, intercultural competence, and L2 socialization.
7. The international exchange participants could be assigned with ethnographic tasks both before and during their international experience (Jackson 2008; Tarp,

2006) in order to help them to increase their intercultural understanding and make contact with people from different backgrounds.

8. The host universities should consider organizing international events more often in order to provide international students with more socialization opportunities; in this way, it would be possible to support newcomers on a constant basis and to create the environments where participants can seek for help and feel supported (Brown & Holloway, 2008). Therefore, the host university should not only help the candidates with accommodation and a basic orientation, it should also assist them while they are seeking membership and active participation in different local and international communities of practice (Sawir et al., 2008). For instance, they could be placed in some student clubs based on their interest areas or could be provided with some internship opportunities (Dewey et al., 2013).
9. There is no guarantee for the participants' active participation in the target culture if they limit their experiences to their own peer circle; therefore, they need to be warned about the value of the program and about the necessity of meeting locals and other international students to maximize and optimize their Erasmus experience. This is not to say that they should ignore their peers during the experience, but they also need to value their existence during the adaptation to a new culture and overcome their cultural loneliness. As for the participants of the present study, students may be put in a connection with some host students before their departure as a preparation to local student networks (Pritchard & Skinner, 2002). This could be achieved through using technological tools over different online platforms. However, for both sides, professionals need to ensure high motivation and involvement; otherwise, it could seem as an add-on assignment, which may not serve the purpose for which they were designed (Ciftci, 2016). In addition, organizing a network that would allow the interactions of study abroad alumni and prospective exchange students could be of significant benefit although, in this study, one such exchange student generally helped the participants with practical issues rather than helping them to develop strategies to integrate into local communities of practice.

10. *Language* component of the preparation could be organized in collaboration with international program office at the home context that may establish a network among candidates and current Erasmus exchange students who study at the home university. Supervisors can also initiate and support speaking clubs at the home context. Again, within a preparation program, the candidates can receive help and develop strategies for expanding their social networks in a study abroad context; otherwise, they tend to think that the experience could be centered in their peer-circle; therefore, they legitimate observation instead of participation.
11. Prospective English language teachers should be informed about their nonnative status and advised not to see themselves as second class or illegitimate language speakers. Despite all their investments up to the point they left the country, the participants in this study still had negative self-perception of themselves regarding their language skills and confidence in speaking English with native speakers. The preparation program may also cover such negative self-construals in order to help the participants to position themselves as legitimate participants instead of viewing themselves as second class or nonnative language teacher candidates with low English proficiency. For that reason they need to be directed to bilingual or multicompetent identities of nonnative speakers or teachers so that they could avoid the feeling of powerlessness resulting from their inefficiency at native speaker norms (Cook, 1992; Park, 2012). They should also be confronted with critical discussions on the ownership of the language, native-nonnative dichotomy, and possible identity confusions among nonnative teachers who may sometimes struggle to position their English language learner (ELL), NNEST, and sojourner identities in international contexts.
12. English language teacher educators in Turkey should inform and encourage students about the benefits of having international experiences. They should also put more emphasis on intercultural issues and increase intercultural activities in the curriculum in order to revive the neglected intercultural issues in ELTE programs in Turkey as English language teaching curriculum and teacher education curriculum in language teaching departments in Turkey are claimed to have lacked practices to prepare language learners or teachers as interculturally

competent people (Atay, 2005; Bayyurt, 2006; Hatipoglu, 2012; Ortactepe, 2015). The *culture*, therefore, should find its place in language teacher education curriculum since it has the potential to increase the likelihood of global teacherhood (Karaman & Tochon, 2007) and to raise culturally responsive teachers (Gay, 2010) who are ready to embrace diversity and create a democratic education for students with different backgrounds. Such efforts invested in the internationalization may foster an interest in study abroad or international programs.

13. Current ELTE programs in Turkey are criticized for the lack of language use opportunities, and the whole language education and examination system in Turkey are under strong attack in terms of its insufficient focus on helping learners to use the language and improve their communicative skills (Cepik & Polat, 2014). Teacher educators, therefore, should not take for granted that having language knowledge is a good indication of intercultural or real life communication. The importance attached to ICC and language practice at language teacher education institutions should be revisited since successful teacher candidates with high CGPA in this study even reported a distrust in their English-speaking skills and lacked awareness toward the importance of having ICC skills.

5.3.2 Recommendations for Further Research

1. This study only focused on the preparation experiences of prospective English language teachers who were selected to study in England from a Turkish context. In the future, further in-depth qualitative studies that cover the whole short-term exchange period including decision-making, preparation, experiences in the target context, and re-entry are needed in order to deeply understand prospective English language teachers' short-term international experiences.
2. The future studies should be conducted with different cohorts from different Turkish and international contexts. These studies should not only focus on English-speaking countries as destination; they can also target student

populations who are selected for different country contexts. Even some comparative studies could be conducted to corroborate the complexity and variation involved in short-term international experiences.

3. This study only focused on the experiences of female students, so future studies can include the experiences of male students, too.
4. Since this study placed paramount importance on active participation and membership seeking in different communities of practice in the target context, future studies can investigate membership seeking process in such communities of practice through an in-depth qualitative social network analysis. In such further studies, the critical role of the old-timers should also be closely examined.
5. Since limiting communication to peer-circle in a study abroad context may have a debilitating impact on sojourn gains, the dynamics of group togetherness with co-nationals can be further examined in order to further understand the role of peer-circle on short-term international experiences.
6. This study clearly showed that the participants had a fear of speaking English with native speakers. Some future research efforts could be invested in cultivating self-confidence among nonnative teacher candidates in terms of developing effective communication strategies with native speakers or with other people in international contexts.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS

1st INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Focus of the Interview: Past experiences covering the decision-making process for the Erasmus exchange program

Time of the Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Gender and Age of the Interviewee:

Year of the Study at the Home University:

Nickname Chosen:

Introduction: This study aims to describe the lived and imagined experiences of prospective English language teachers at one of the state universities in Turkey during the preparation period prior to their upcoming international experience. You have been selected to speak with me today because you have been identified as an eligible person to study abroad via the Erasmus program. This research project as a whole focuses on the understanding of your experiences while deciding to join this international program and while preparing for the program. Our study does not aim to judge your decisions and experiences. We are trying to learn more about your experiences related to being a part of the Erasmus exchange program. With the help of the findings of this study, we consider informing future/current undergraduate students who have similar concerns and experiences including you, too.

Questions:

1. Can you tell me a bit about your personal background?
 - Probes and prompts: self-descriptions (adjectives); family; international experiences; international experiences of family and friends; family structure; the environment where you grew up; educational background; language(s); the role of English in your life
2. How did you decide to be a part of the Erasmus exchange program?
 - Probes and prompts: first encounter with the program; specific experiences before and during decision-making; the experiences during the application period; emotions; influence of other people (positive and negative impacts)
3. What do you think led you to choose this host country and university?
 - Probes and prompts: contentment with the country and university choice
4. How do you feel now as a candidate for the Erasmus exchange program?
 - Probes and prompts: emotions and experiences after being selected as a candidate; the feeling of being one of those “few” people who have that chance to study abroad; the help you get (e.g., international cooperations office and coordinators at the department); imagination of the situation in which they chose not to study abroad
5. How do you feel about the idea of living in a different country and in a different educational setting?
 - Probes and prompts: Salmon Line for readiness to live in the target culture
6. Is there anything else that you want to share with me related to your *Erasmus experience* so far?

Post Interview Comments:

2nd INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Focus of the Interview: Future-oriented imagined experiences and current reflections/feelings

Time of the Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Nickname:

Introduction: In our previous interview, we focused more on your past experiences which led you to decide to be a part of the Erasmus exchange program. In this interview, we will talk more about your future-oriented imagined experiences and feelings including your present experiences in terms of the preparation toward your Erasmus experience. I would like to thank you again for sharing your experiences and ideas with me.

Questions:

1. What are your current feelings about living in a foreign culture and in a different educational setting?
 - Probes and prompts: your definition and description of *culture*; the things that you are excited for/worried about in terms of a foreign culture and a different educational setting
2. What do you know about the target country and host university?
 - Probes and prompts: culture; language; social life; academic life; sources of the existing knowledge
3. How do you feel about your foreign language skills related to your future Erasmus experience?

- Probes and prompts: the languages that you know; reasons for learning English or other languages; the role of English/other foreign languages in your life; how the knowledge of English/other foreign languages connects you to the rest of the world; the benefits that English/other foreign languages bring to you; satisfaction with current language skills; competencies in the language of the host culture; any intention to learn new languages
4. What are your plans for the Erasmus exchange program?
 - Probes and prompts: academic learning; interactions with locals and other people; extra-curricular activities; language and cultural learning; specific plans for your English language teaching education/career
 5. What kind of benefits do you see in both short and long-term period in terms of the Erasmus exchange program?
 - Probes and prompts: The greatest benefits; contribution to your language and cultural learning; anticipation of potential benefits for your career in language teaching
 6. What will be the major challenges for you during your exchange period?
 - Probes and prompts: The greatest challenge; possible scenarios
 7. How do you feel about living in a European country?
 - Probes and prompts: national/religious identity; the culture you feel belonged to; your feelings in the home culture; what connects you to the Turkish culture and other foreign cultures; the meaning you ascribe to the Turkish culture; your understanding of *culture*
 8. How can you describe your ideal foreign community in which you wish to live?
 9. How can you describe the feared foreign community that you wish not to face with?
 10. What may cause you not to participate in local culture in the target country or avoid contact with local people?

- Probes and prompts: your reaction and feelings in case of a rejection or discrimination by local or international communities

11. What kind of future do you see for yourself?

- Probes and prompts: career plans

12. Is there anything else that you would like to share in terms of your progress/preparation toward living in England?

- Probes and prompts: the help you receive; readiness to live in the target country; important events related to your preparation

Post Interview Comments:

3rd INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Focus of the Interview: Reflections on the whole preparation period and feelings prior to the departure

Time of the Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Nickname:

Introduction: In our previous interview, which took place almost three months ago, we focused on your imagined future experiences in the target community/society and you shared your preparation experiences up to that moment. In this interview, we will talk more about your reflections on the whole preparation period since you will officially be an Erasmus exchange student in a couple of weeks. We will particularly talk about your current feelings, ideas, and imagined experiences toward your upcoming international experience. You may also be asked to reflect on some points that emerged from our previous interviews. I would like to thank you again and again for sharing your experiences and ideas with me so far.

Questions:

1. What do you think about your readiness to live in a different country and in a different educational setting?
 - Probes and prompts: Salmon Line (a line on which participants pick a point between being ready and not being ready) for readiness to live in the target culture and educational system
2. What kind of preparations have you made so far?
 - Probes and prompts: the courses you have selected; visa application process; accommodation; the contacts with people from target community; the communication with previous exchange students
3. What do you know about the target country and host university?
 - Probes and prompts: current and updated knowledge about the target culture; knowledge about language, social and academic life; sources of the existing knowledge
4. What are your current feelings and plans about living in a foreign culture and in a different educational setting?
 - Probes and prompts: the things you are excited for/worried about in terms of a foreign culture and a different educational setting; current plans for social, academic, and daily life in target community; perceived challenges
5. How do you think this international experience will contribute to your life?
 - Probes and prompts: estimated benefits; potential contributions to the ongoing language teacher education process
6. How will this international experience bring some shortcomings to your life?
Any lost opportunities?
7. How do you feel about your foreign language skills related to your upcoming Erasmus experience?
 - Probes and prompts: satisfaction level with current language skills; any deliberate practice so far

8. How do you evaluate the application process in terms of the help and support you received from institutions?
 - Probes and prompts: the quality and quantity of help; the problems encountered; any particular points to be improved/changed
9. How do you feel about your peers who will also study at the same university?
 - Probes and prompts: the lived experiences together during the application process; the plans made together
10. How did our study contribute to your preparation as an Erasmus exchange program candidate?
11. Is there anything else that you want to share with me related to your Erasmus experience so far?

Post Interview Comments:

APPENDIX B: INSTRUCTIONS FOR IMAGINED EXPERIENCES

Dear participant,

First of all, thank you very much for accepting to participate in this research study. We have just completed our first interview. For the second one, we will elaborate more on your imagined experiences toward the Erasmus exchange program. Before this interview takes place, I would like you to describe your imagined experiences in the target country context by choosing one of the options below:

- A. You can write your imagined *one week experience* in the target community with three levels: (1) university and academic life, (2) life in the social communities and (3) individual time. You will find these main headings in the notepad provided to you by the researcher.
- B. You can share the same one week period with the same levels in the imagined community with a voice recording device. You will also be provided with the notepad in case you may want to draw something related to your imagined experiences. You are free to use the notepad or not.

As for the descriptions, please do not limit yourself only to the defined headings; you are free to draw anything you want, you can illustrate or tell the image of the city you will live, you can describe the people that you will interact with, and the environments you will be in such as Erasmus student organizations or regular city life, you can elaborate on social activities and daily routines, you can talk about your free time activities. These are just some example points that you can provide, and for sure, your imagination will be much richer than these points. When you imagine yourself in the target country as an Erasmus exchange student, there could also be some points that do not fall under the defined headings, but you are always free and welcome to share them with the researcher. You are, therefore, asked to imagine and describe a regular one week during your Erasmus experience freely in line with the headings provided to you.

Lastly, this *one week* is the one in which you have already got adapted to living in the target country since it is predicted that you will have some adaptation issues during the first weeks of your experience, so this *one week* is in the middle of your experience and not at the beginning and not at toward the end of your experience. Moreover, you are not expected to write your experiences day by day or hour by hour; instead, please just provide major imagined experiences with the settings and environments in which they are likely to happen. The rationale for asking one week period is to help you imagine in a defined period and provide richer descriptions.

After writing or recording your experiences, you are kindly asked to share them with the researcher 2-3 days before our second interview takes place. If you happen to have any questions on the way, please do not hesitate to ask them through e-mail.

Thank you very much again and again for your valuable contributions to this study! I will see you again in our next interview to talk about your imagined experiences.

Best wishes,

E. Yasin Ciftci

APPENDIX C: CODES AND MASTER THEMES

Ece's Code System

Code System (Please read each column down)	
Personality, Identity, Previous experience(s) abroad	Decision-making
Valuing international friendships	Hearing Erasmus for the first time at high school
Positive influence of abroad experiences on language learning	Giving up the idea of Erasmus at the university
A heightened self-confidence with academic success	Wishing to study in spring semester
A successful English learner at high school	Final decision-making after meeting other candidates
Finishing high school at first rank	Searching for other candidates through Facebook
Moving closer to global citizenship	Feeling relieved after meeting other candidates
Not feeling a Muslim identity	Decision-making on the semester all together
Seeing Turkish identity attached not inherent	"I would not do if I was alone"
Feeling open-minded toward other cultures	Strong influence of family and friends on decision-making
Avoiding new opportunities	Having a small family
Feeling open in terms of religious issues	Family concerns as a barrier to international experience
"I am susceptible"	Depending on family for decisions
Avoiding responsibility and risk	Supportive family
Perfectionist	Valuing England for her future job
Dreamer	Creating a pro/con list before decision-making
Not being an initiator	Not a fan of England
Planned and organized	CGPA as a determiner
Lacking self-confidence	Keele as the only and first option
Selection process	Importance of language of instruction

Not realizing the opportunity	Happy with the decision
Excitement with announcement of results	Informal preparation process
Feeling happy after being selected	Group togetherness
Formal preparation process	"A stressful group"
Lack of systematic procedures	Turning to peers after rejection in target society
Complaints about lack of empathy	Hanging with peers during adaptation period
Complaints about lack of clarity	Feeling more comfortable with other candidates
Complaints about lack of help	A need for more capable people for preparation
A desire for a capable supervisor	Feeling a need for attachment to other candidates
Different priorities from different country contexts	Sources of information
Being treated as second class human being	TV series as a source of learning language
Feeling relieved after arranging accommodation	TV series as a source for understanding culture
Ambiguity in course selection	Watching TV series for improving English
"Many things to complete"	Internet as a source of information
Feeling confident thanks to pick-up from airport	Imagining the experience as boring
Visa seen as a barrier	Taking traditional Turkish sweets to England
Feeling stressed prior to the procedures	Feeling happy with mails sent by the host university
Lacking a feel of control during the process	Changing mood for the preparation period
Culture and language dynamics	Perceiving cultural introduction as "sweet"
Prioritizing English over other foreign languages	Lacking confidence in language skills
Using English for searching things online	Limited English skills as an obstacle for communication
English knowledge as a bridge to the world	Facebook interactions before the exchange

English knowledge as a gate to information	Planning to watch academic videos for the accent
Professional relationship with host instructors	Many preparation plans but limited time
Professional instructors at the host university	Getting more negative prior to departure
Comparing home and host universities	Feeling not ready to go
"Cultural differences"	Ongoing communication with foreign friends
Stereotypes from imagined experiences	Supportive sojourner who is already there
Feeling upset after a potential rejection	Appreciation of host students
Sarcasm as a strategy to cope with prejudiced people	Excitement with a new experience
Awareness for communication with different people	Plans
Feeling responsibility for Turkish image	Planning to be more social
Having a realistic image of England	Planning to challenge her stereotypes
Focusing on similarities between cultures	Planning to follow current events in England
Turkey as a "distant" country	Focused more on "stressful" details
Imagination of teacher-student relationship as "distant"	Positive toward teaching profession
Looking for a similar environment in the target culture	Experiences to tell future language students
Prevalence of stereotypes among Turkish people	Developing intercultural competence of students
Stereotyped opinions for social life in Britain	Encouraging future students for study abroad
Not expecting a sharp cultural difference	Willing to be an English instructor in the future
Confession of stereotypes	Planning to pursue graduate programs abroad
Feeling remorseful for not investing in culture	Low expectations for Erasmus students
No contact with target culture	Planning to see new places
Feeling confident with integration into target society	Not so enthusiastic about British landmarks
Positive attitude toward experiencing a new	Planning to explore differences between

culture

Lack of knowledge toward target culture

Questioning cultural elements

Viewing Turkish culture as collectivist

Generalization of culture

Trying not to generalize cultural aspects

Underestimating the importance of intercultural competence

Previous intercultural encounter and stereotypical questions

Perceiving Turkish society as prejudiced

Motives

An English teacher with valuable memories

An English teacher who encourages students to study abroad

An English teacher who speaks English fluently

An English teacher who presents accent differences

Excitement with the chance to speak English

A comprehensive and nice program

4 months as a valuable time

Movies as motivator

Erasmus as a dream at high school

Prestige of England

Erasmus as an opportunity for self-growth

Viewing Erasmus as a "travelling" opportunity

Not prioritizing fun aspects

Prioritizing academic aspects

dialects

Planning to improve listening skills for the British accent

Not planning to speak with a British accent

Planning to be more active

Planning to learn British history

Planning to learn important people in British politics

Planning to learn daily routines

Planning to improve speaking skills

Influence of other people on plans

Expectations

Potential spaces for socialization

Seeing classes as an opportunity for socialization

Wishing for an open-minded target society

Wishing for a helpful target society

Wishing for a target society with empathy skills

Concerns and fears

"Attention, Novice!"

Missing Turkey

Fear of having classes with native speakers

Fear of being discriminated

Fear for isolating herself

Fear of native speakers of English

"we have the fear of loneliness, they don't"

Leaving close people behind

Feeling sorry for missing school experience course

Feeling tense with the idea of a foreign environment

Concerned about spending time with peers

Concerned about course registration

Concerned about first times in England

Lacking real-life speaking practice

Finding integration challenging

Keele not offering enough social activities

Concerned about financial issues

Concerned about target academic environment

Concerned about a new educational setting

Concerned about credit recognition

Feeling incompetent at speaking

England as an expensive country

Concerned about prolonging graduation

Uncertainty with school experience course

Concerned about future job prospects

Melek's Code System

Code System (Please read each column down)	
Personality, Identity, Previous Experience(s) Abroad	Decision-making
Viewing herself as independent	Feeling a need to improve life skills
Not viewing herself as outgoing	Not too concerned about graduation
Identifying herself as tolerating differences	Feeling happy to be with Turkish peers
Feeling closer to Islam	Postponing the opportunity till last year
Mobility as a habit	Choosing England for the English language
Nomad	Germany as the first choice at the

	beginning
The dominance of Turkish identity	Hearing Erasmus for the first time at high school
Her mother's encouragement for learning English	Her agency as central to the decision
A successful language student at high school	Supportive close friends
An intermediate German speaker	Supportive family members
Born in Germany	England as the first choice later
Developed a more individual life-style	Erasmus as a meaningful step for her career
Not feeling like Turkish-German	Choosing the first semester not to miss graduation ceremony
Timid	Influential close people for decision making
Feeling more brave compared with non-Erasmus participants	Selection process
Feeling confident with adaptation	Feeling happy with the announcement
Having a desire for international travels	Felt more confident after being selected
A pen pal from Canada at high school	Surprised with the England result
No communication with native speakers	Happy with England choice
Formal preparation process	Informal preparation process
A sense of progress toward the end of preparation period	Supportive peers
A more difficult formal process without peers	Lack of excitement
A need for an ongoing informative meetings	Failing to prepare for the language
Basic communication with the host university	Fun image of Erasmus
Lack of clarity during visa procedure	Experiencing a mixture of emotions
Taking a language course only for credit recognition	Internet as the main source of information
A lack of friendly attitude toward them by officials	Selective attention biased for the UK in the media
Visa seen as a barrier	Observation of re-entry shock experienced by previous students
Need for help with paperwork	Individual differences in the Erasmus program

Financial support from her father	Supportive sojourner who is already there
Lack of help and support from people in charge	Motives
Lack of empathy toward them	Focusing more on the gains
Culture and language dynamics	Excited with the opportunity to take courses in English
An interest toward different accents in the UK	Dorm life as an opportunity for language improvement
Missing to speak Turkish	Erasmus as CV enhancer
Feeling more confident with Turkish	An opportunity to develop life skills
Need for communication in English	Excited about travelling
Desire to use passive vocabulary knowledge	Positive about a new educational setting
Feeling connected to the word with English knowledge	Predicting Erasmus to be beneficial for speaking
Desire to improve her English	A “fun” image of Erasmus
(stereotypes from imagined experiences)	Priority of academic prospects
A need for global sensitivity	Expectations
Trying to be open-minded toward other cultures	Expecting to learn more about different cultures
The possibility to become a cultural ambassador	Expecting to be a more active student after Erasmus
Westernized countries behind the popular culture	Lack of speaking opportunities at the home university
Consumer of popular culture	Not happy with current teacher education curriculum
Viewing Turkish society as polarized	Hoping to make close friends
Feeling closer to Turkish people	Expecting to find an open-minded society
Observer of the target culture, not the participant	Expecting a different environment from Turkey
Not positioning herself as legitimate participant	An English teacher with valuable and motivating memories
Interested only with language not culture	An English teacher with higher language proficiency
Planning to be sarcastic for stereotypical questions	Anticipated socialization spaces
Not feeling belonging to any other culture but Turkish	Language teacher education in Britain as more student-centered

Following websites in English	Plans
Reading English books	Planning to be a more active student
A need for feeling prepared regarding target culture	The role of previous experiences on future plans
Lack of knowledge toward target culture	Planning to observe accent differences
Simple understanding of culture	Planning to read books before going there
Viewing British culture as closer to popular culture	Planning to attend social events
Focusing on similarities between cultures	Planning to learn more about touristic aspects of the UK
Stereotyped opinions for British culture	Planning to prolong graduation one more semester
Following British culture through media and books	Planning to travel
Having interest in other cultures	Planning to examine different registers of English
Media as the only reference for culture	Planning to visit major attractions
Having an interest in British culture	Planning to follow popular news in England
Germany as a touristic destination for her	Flight attendant as an alternative career
TV series acting like an advertisement for countries	Planning to meet new people
Watching TV series	Planning to be an English instructor
Following some news	Planning to have a master's degree
Concerns and fears	Planning to improve her fluency
Concerned about failure in improving language skills	Planning to collect information about touristic destinations
Concerned about leaving close people behind	Planning to improve her listening skills for the British accent
Concerned about locking up in the Turkish peer circle	Planning to read about target culture
Not concerned about financial issues	Realistic goals for the British accent
Concerned about dorm life	Not feeling familiarity toward the British accent
Concerned about visa procedure	Planning to be a teacher at a state university
Concerned about her speaking skills	Planning to be an English instructor

Concerned about adaptation period	Planning to explore cuisine culture
Concerned about the first week in England	
Concerned about being alone	
Taking reflective teaching course due to graduation concerns	
Expecting stereotypical questions toward her own culture	
Low trust in her English speaking abilities	
Concerned about a new educational system	
Fear for "fish out of water"	
Concerned about living on her own for the first time	
"I will have to speak English"	
Fear for prolonging graduation	
Concerned about food in England	

Nur's Code System

Code System (Please read each column down)	
Personality, Identity, Previous experience(s) abroad	Formal preparation process
Living with family in Turkey	Ambiguity in the help process
Boarding high school	Lack of help with course selection
Undergraduate transfer to current university	Feeling lucky for having her peers
Mother as an English instructor	Dealing mostly with formal processes
Close relationship among family members	Uneasy about overdependence on Ceren
Having an ambitious side	Taking some courses for instrumental reasons
Feeling lucky with her life steps and decisions	Satisfied with the help from ICO
A tense personality	Happy with dorm placement
Having slight obsessions	Complaints about lack of help

Lacking a stable self-confidence	Discontentment with the attitude of officials
Perceiving herself as not outgoing enough	Finding Facebook page as useful
"I am a normal Turk"	Satisfied with the help from the host university
"I am a conservative"	A tiring visa process
Avoiding questioning belief systems	Confession of their exaggerated reactions to the process as a group
Decision-making	A stressful formal procedure
Giving up on Erasmus at previous university	Informal preparation process
Erasmus opportunity at current university as a surprise	Restless parents for her life in England
Erasmus as a dream	An increasing excitement with the Erasmus idea
Surprised with England option	Being busy with current courses
England as the first choice	Excited about the courses
England as the valuable option	Excited about dorm life
"Wow" factor with England	Familiarization to dorm life
A good opportunity for improving English	Individual differences among previous sojourners
Family support for England option	Insufficient time to prepare for life in England
Hopeful for graduating on time	"I want it to be a surprise"
Erasmus as a tempting program	Watching TV products to improve her accent familiarization
Inspired by Erasmus stories	Feeling relieved for having Ece next to her room
Erasmus as a good opportunity for both fun and studies	Collecting practical information from Ceren
Erasmus as a more settled program	Becoming more realistic prior to departure
A positive image of the Erasmus program	Finding Keele's website informative
Parallel choices to her language learning history	Relying on online sources for informal preparation
Valuing the Erasmus program	Culture and language dynamics
Selection process	Speaking English in her dreams

Excitement and happiness with the announcement	Limited opportunities to speak English in Turkey
Feeling privileged	Learning languages for instrumental reasons
Motives	(stereotypes from imagined experiences)
"It's all worth it"	Feeling demotivated after a potential discrimination
Going abroad for the first time	Having a tolerant attitude
Desire for improving her life skills	Turning to peers after a possible rejection
Determined to cope with every difficulty	Lack of knowledge toward target culture
Hoping to improve her language skills	English people as "cold"
First step for further international experiences	European countries as hardworking and powerful
Having self-confidence in her Erasmus experience	Confession of holding stereotypes
Erasmus as CV enhancer	Knowledge of English as a gate to outer world
Having the best option for an English teacher candidate	TV products as the source of cultural knowledge
Erasmus in England as a big opportunity	Questioning the image of Turkey in Europe
"Travelling to the center of the world"	An intercultural encounter in Turkey
Expectations	Plans
Expecting to have a rich life in England	Planning to invest in her life skills
Improving English at the dorm	Being "tourist" outside the campus
Expecting tolerance toward her belief system	Being "student" at the campus
Hoping to be welcomed	Not planning to be ambitious there
"Return as the same person as you were"	Planning to live "Erasmus life"
An English teacher with cultural knowledge	Planning to travel
Having an access to "natural English"	Planning to be more outgoing
Improving "slang" knowledge	Not planning to "party hard"
An English teacher with authentic experiences	Feeling more confident with talking to international students
Expecting to find a tolerant society	Planning to be a professor

Expecting a nice weather

"Not too much expectations from the courses"

An English teacher with a high level of fluency in English

Expecting to learn new instructional strategies

Planning to learn how to cook

Determined to make new friends

Planning to explore the attitude of instructors toward students

Concerns and fears

Leaving family for the first time

Concerned about failing to improve her English skills

Concerned about life skills

Concerned about adaptation to new educational setting

Concerned about "oral exams"

Relieved with pick-up from airport

Feeling tense about living abroad for the first time

Concerned about prejudices toward Turks

Viewing the duration as insufficient for integration

Fear of failing to integrate

Concerned about her speaking skills

Concerned about not understanding their accent

Concerned about financial issues

Concerned about failing to make new friends

Concerned about weather conditions in England

APPENDIX D: ETHICS COMMITTEE APPROVAL

UYGULAMALI ETİK ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ
APPLIED ETHICS RESEARCH CENTER



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23.03.2015

Gönderilen : Y.Doç.Dr. Abdullah Cendel Karaman
Yabancı Diller Eğitimi

Gönderen : Prof. Dr. Canan Sümer
IAK Başkan Vekili

İlgi : Etik Onayı

Danışmanlığını yapmış olduğunuz İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Bölümü öğrencisi Emrullah Yasin Çiftçi'nin "Getting Ready for the Erasmus Exchange Program: Exploring the Lived Experiences and Imagined Communities of Turkish Pre-Service English Teachers Who Choose To Study Abroad" isimli araştırması "İnsan Araştırmaları Komitesi" tarafından uygun görülerek gerekli onay verilmiştir.

Bilgilerinize saygılarımla sunarım.

Etik Komite Onayı

Uygundur

23/03/2015

Prof.Dr. Canan Sümer
Uygulamalı Etik Araştırma Merkezi
(UEAM) Başkan Vekili
ODTÜ 06531 ANKARA

APPENDIX E: TURKISH SUMMARY

ULUSLARARASI BİR DEĞİŞİM PROGRAMI İÇİN HAZIRLIK: İNGİLİZCE ÖĞRETMEN ADAYLARININ YAŞANMIŞ VE HAYAL EDİLMİŞ DENEYİMLERİNİN FENOMENOLOJİK BİR ANALİZİ

GİRİŞ

Dünya genelinde üniversite öğrencilerinden çok kültürlü ve çok dilli ortamlarda çalışmaya hazırlığın bir parçası olarak İngilizce ve kültürler arası yetkinliklerdeki iletişim becerilerini geliştirmeleri beklenir (Byram, 1997; Graddol 2006). Ayrıca, vatandaşların farklı dünya görüşlerine olan hassasiyetlerini geliştirmek ve demokratik halk eğitimini teşvik etmek dünya çapında eğitim sistemlerinin önemli hedefleri haline gelmiştir (Kramsch, 2014; Tochon 2009). Bu ihtiyaçları karşılamak için, uluslararası hareketlilik artarak teşvik edilmekte ve devletler tarafından düzenlenmektedir (Teichler & Janson, 2007). Böylesi uluslararası programlar İngilizce öğretmen adaylarının gelişimine de katkıda bulunabilir. Doğrusu, kültürler ve uluslararası konulardaki potansiyelleri açısından uluslararası programların önemi İngilizce öğretmeni eğitiminde kabul edilmiştir (Barkhuizen & Feryok, 2006). Bu alanda çalışmalar yürüten araştırmacılar, bu nedenle, bu konu ile ilgili olan insanların bu tür programları değerlendirebilmesi ve gerekli adımları atabilmeleri için daha fazla çalışma yapılmasını önermektedir (Barkhuizen & Feryok, 2006; Lee, 2009; Yang, 2011). Daha geniş bir perspektiften bakıldığında, yurtdışı eğitim programlarına ilişkin literatür derinlemesine nitel çalışmaların ciddi eksikliğinden yakınmaktadır (Aydın, 2012). Bu yetersizlik Türkiye bağlamında İngilizce dil öğretmen adaylarının deneyimleri açısından daha da ciddi bir hal almaktadır.

Bu bağlamda, derinlemesine bir nitel araştırma yardımıyla, bu çalışma Erasmus programının bir parçası olarak İngiltere'de eğitim almayı seçen Türk İngilizce öğretmen adaylarının hazırlık deneyimlerini ve hedef toplumdaki hayal edilmiş

deneyimlerini ortaya koymayı amaçlamıştır. Çalışma özellikle bir bilimsel girişim olarak hazırlık deneyimleri üzerinde durmayı tercih etmiştir çünkü yurtdışı eğitim programlarına yönelik literatür uluslararası bir değişim programı öncesindeki inançlar, motivasyonlar, öngörülen zorluklar, ev sahibi ülkenin kültürüne yönelik tutumların ve kişisel geçmişlerin değişim döneminin kalitesi üzerinde dikkate değer bir etkiye sahip olduğunu göstermektedir (Dekaney, 2008; Jackson, 2010; Teichler, 2004). Hazırlık dönemi boyunca geleceğe yönelik düşünce örüntülerine ve yaşanılan deneyimlere odaklanarak, çalışma dolayısıyla karar verme sürecinden Türkiye’deki en son güne kadar olan deneyimlere yönelik derinlemesine bir anlayış geliştirmeyi amaçlamıştır. Hayal edilmiş deneyimler aracılığıyla da katılımcıların geleceğe yönelik düşünce örüntülerini anlamak ve hedef toplumdaki katılımları ve yatırımlarını tahmin etmek amaçlanmıştır. Gelecek odaklı bir yaklaşım katılımcıların karşı toplumla olacak olan etkileşimlerini arttırmak ve program faydalarını en üst düzeye çıkarmak ve optimize etmek için büyük önem taşımaktadır. Son olarak, Erasmus programının öğretmen adaylarının perspektifinden İngilizce öğretmen eğitimine nasıl bir katkı sağlayabileceğini anlamak da bu çalışmanın kapsamı altına alınmıştır. Bu şekilde, kısa vadeli uluslararası deneyimlerin İngilizce dil öğretmen adaylarına neler vaat ettiği hakkında öğretmen eğitimcilerini ve bu konu ile ilgilenen bütün yetkilileri bilgilendirmek amaçlanmıştır.

Kavramsal Çerçeve

Öğretmen adaylarının günümüzde çeşitliliğin yüksek olduğu sınıflarda eğitim vermek için hazır olması gerekmektedir (Dooly & Villanueva, 2006). Ancak, böylesi bir hazırlık için araştırmalar *teorinin* yeterli olmadığını, aynı zamanda *pratik deneyim* ve *yansımanın* da olması gerektiğini göstermiştir (Burns & Richards, 2009; Dooly & Villanueva, 2006). Teorik bilgilerin pratiğe çevrilmesinde öğretmen öğrenmesi için *bağlam* son derece önem arz etmektedir (Putnam & Borko, 2000; Wright, 2010) çünkü farklı bağlamların farklı türde öğrenmelere yol açtığı bilinmektedir (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Bu tür deneyimsel öğrenme ile ilgili ihtiyaçları karşılamak için uluslararası ortamlarda farklı uygulama topluluklarına katılım geleceğin öğretmenlerinin eğitimi için önemli gelişimsel fırsatlar sunabilir (Wenger, 1999). Bu

tarzdaki katılımsal uluslararası deneyimler sayesinde adaylar kendilerinininkinden farklı dünyalar, kültürler ve diller hakkında daha derin anlayışlar inşa edebilir. (Lee, 2009; Willard-Holt, 2002). Ancak, yurt dışı eğitim programları tarafından sunulan potansiyel gelişim alanlardan faydalanmak için uluslararası öğrencilerin yurtdışındaki uygulama topluluklarına aktif katılım göstermesi gerekmektedir (Amuzie & Winke 2009; Barkhuizen & Feryok, 2006; Jackson, 2010; Karaman & Tochon 2010). Bu nedenle, Graves (2009)'un da savunduğu çerçevede, yurtdışında okuyacak öğrencilerin kendi geçmiş ve zihniyetlerini anlaması gerekmektedir; ancak bu şekilde gerekli adımların atılması mümkün olacaktır.

Bu çalışmada, yurtdışında kısa süreliğine eğitim görmek için hazırlanan öğretmen adaylarının geleceğe yönelik düşünce örüntülerini araştırmak amacıyla *hayali topluluklar* kavramı üzerinde de durulmuştur (Anderson, 1983; Kanno & Norton, 2003). Norton (2000, 2001)'in savunduğu üzere dil öğrenen insanlar öğrendikleri dilin dünyasına hissettikleri bağılıktan dolayı zihinlerinde hayali topluluklar oluştururlar. Yurtdışı eğitim programları çerçevesinde, hayali toplulukların incelenmesi aracılığıyla, uluslararası değişim öğrencisi adaylarının dinamik düşünce örüntülerinin karmaşık bir resmini göstermek mümkündür. Bu çalışmada özellikle hem yaşanmış hem de hayal edilmiş deneyimleri inceleyerek İngiltere'de Erasmus programı kapsamında kısa süreli eğitim almayı seçen Türk hizmet öncesi İngilizce öğretmenlerinin kapsamlı bir resmini vermek hedeflenmiştir. Bu şekilde katılımcıların yurtdışındaki hayali uygulama topluluklarına olan katılımlarını tartışmak ve hedef toplumda yaşayacakları zorlukları ve katılım arayışlarını tahmin etmek mümkün olmuştur.

YÖNTEM

Katılımcıların yaşanmış ve hayal edilmiş deneyimlerini derinlemesine betimlemek amacıyla bu çalışmada fenomenolojik bir nitel araştırma yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Fenomenoloji sadece bir araştırma yöntemi değil aynı zamanda bir felsefe olduğu için filozoflar arasında farklı yaklaşımlar mevcuttur (Dowling, 2007). Yorumlayıcı fenomenologlar katılımcıların doğrudan deneyimlerine erişim sağlamanın imkânsızlığı nedeniyle veri analizinin her zaman araştırmacının kendi dünya

görüşünü yansıtacağını savunurlar (Smith, 1996; Van Manen, 1990). Genel olarak, bu çalışmada, yorumsal fenomenolojik analiz (IPA) yöntemi benimsenmiş (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) ve bulguların yorumlanması sırasında da kavramsal çerçeveye başvurulmuştur.

Smith ve diğ. (2009) tipik bir IPA çalışması için katılımcı sayısını üç ve altı arası olarak vermektedir. Bu çalışma için İngiltere'de Erasmus programına yerleştirilen üç İngilizce öğretmen adayı, Ece, Melek ve Nur (takma isimler) seçilmiştir. Bu odak grubun seçilmesinin temel nedeni İngiltere'nin İngilizce öğretmen eğitimi için en uygun hedef olmuş olmasıdır. Araştırma amaçları doğrultusunda, araştırmacı altı aylık bir hazırlık dönemi boyunca üç fenomenolojik yarı yapılandırılmış mülakat gerçekleştirmiştir. Derinlemesine görüşmelerin yanı sıra, araştırmacı aynı zamanda katılımcılara hedef toplumdaki hayali bir haftalık deneyimlerini yazabilecekleri bir not defteri sağlamıştır. Ayrıca, katılımcıların rızası alınarak hazırlık sürecine ilişkin akıllı telefon mesajlaşmaları gözlenmiştir.

Bu çalışmada veri analizi için nitel bir veri analizi yazılımı, MAXQDA 12, kullanılmıştır. Her şeyden önce, araştırmacı kaydedilen tüm röportajların transkripsiyonu bir bilgisayar üzerinde hazırlamış ve bir sonraki adımda MAXQDA 12 yazılımıyla analiz edebilmek amacıyla bütün verileri uygun dijital duruma getirmiştir. Sıradaki adım her bir katılımcının sağladığı verilerin *ilk kodlanması* gerektirmiştir. Bu kodlama işleminin ardından, kodlar, notlar ve ortaya çıkan örüntüler arasındaki bağlantıları gösteren sonuçlar haritalanmıştır. Daha sonra, nihai üstanlamsal temalar oluşturulmuştur. IPA bireyleri merkeze alan bir uygulama olduğu için her bir analiz adımı bir sonraki katılımcının transkripsiyonuna geçmeden önce her katılımcıya özgü bir analiz gerektirmiştir. Bütün katılımcıların analizleri tamamlandıktan sonra, katılımcılar arasındaki yakınlaşmalar ve farklılıklar aranmıştır. Bu nedenle, son üstanlamsal temalar tüm adayların deneyimlerini ve düşünce örüntülerini yansıtmıştır. Burada paylaşılan Türkçe özet sadece tüm katılımcıların deneyimlerini kapsayan üstanlamsal temaları paylaşmıştır; ancak, okuyucu ayrıntılı vaka raporlarına da dilemeleri halinde bu tez içerisinde başvurabilir.

BULGULAR

Yorumlayıcı fenomenolojik analiz sürecini takiben, katılımcıların deneyimlerinin *karmaşık ve dinamik bir karar verme süreci, stresli bir resmi hazırlık süreci, kaotik ve göz ardı edilmiş resmi olmayan bir hazırlık süreci, hedef kültürü içeren ve gelişen kültürlerarası dinamikler ve birbiriyle ilişkili gelecek odaklı dinamik düşünce örüntüleri* tarafından şekillendirildiği bulunmuştur.

Karmaşık ve Dinamik Bir Karar Verme Süreci

Katılımcılar genel olarak İngiltere'de edinecekleri uluslararası deneyimin onlara yeni sermaye biçimlerine erişmek için yardımcı olacağını ve böylece İngilizce iletişim becerilerinin gelişmesi ve kendi perspektiflerinden Erasmus programının yüksek piyasa değeri sonucu iş olanaklarının artacağını düşünmüşlerdir. Ancak, katılımcılar nihai kararlarını vermeden önce nispeten düşük bütçeleri ve zamanında mezun olamama kaygılarından dolayı tereddüt etmişlerdir; yine de, ailelerinin ve arkadaşlarının desteğiyle ve Erasmus programı tarafından sunulan potansiyel edinimleri düşünerek nihai ve sabit kararlarını vermişlerdir. Ayrıca, eğlence ve macera olanakları, kültürlerarası ve yaşam becerilerini geliştirme imkânı, medya, edebiyat ve söylentilerden doğan İngiltere'de Erasmus programına katılmanın olumlu imajı katılımcılar için karar verme sürecini kolaylaştırmıştır. Bir diğer ilginç nokta da katılımcıların üniversiteler yerine ülkelere odaklanmaları olmuştur. Bu aslında onların itibarlı İngiltere seçeneğinin süregelen öğretmen eğitimlerine ve gelecekteki kariyerlerine daha faydalı olabileceğini düşündüklerini göstermiştir. Aksi takdirde İngiltere'deki eğitimin kalitesi hakkında emin bir görüntü çizememişlerdir.

Stresli Bir Resmi Hazırlık Süreci

İngiltere'de Erasmus programına katılmak için seçildikten sonra katılımcılar stresli ama giderek heyecan verici bir resmi hazırlık dönemi geçirmiştir. Katılımcılar ağırlıklı olarak ev sahibi üniversitede alacakları dersler ve bu derslerin kendi üniversitelerinde hangi dersler yerine tanınacağı konusunda doldurmaları gereken öğrenme anlaşması belgesiyle cebelleşmiştir. Bu belgeyi doldururken kesin bir cevap olmadığını bilmelerine rağmen kendilerine karşı empati ve destek yoksunluğundan

yakınmışlardır çünkü, onların perspektifinden, yetkililer belirsiz yanıtlar sağlamış ve kendi kendilerine süreç ile mücadele etmelerini beklemiştir. Bunun bir sonucu olarak, kendi üniversitelerinin gelecekte daha net ve sistematik bir destek sağlamasını dilemişlerdir. Ancak, yaşadıkları zorluklara çözüm olarak, karşı üniversitede eğitim görmekte ya da görmüş olan Türk Erasmus öğrencileri ile iletişime geçmişlerdir.

Karşı üniversitenin desteği ve ilgisi konusunda katılımcılar daha olumlu görüşler dile getirmiştir. Katılımcılar özellikle karşı üniversite tarafından kurulan, diğer öğrencilerle tanışmayı ve soru sormayı mümkün kılan çevrimiçi platformu faydalı bulduklarını belirtmişlerdir. Aynı zamanda, havaalanında karşılama, uyum faaliyetleri, uluslararası gün ve global eğitim ekibi (GET) tarafından düzenlenecek etkinlikler hakkında karşı üniversiteden gelen bilgilendirici e-postalar yaklaşan uluslararası tecrübelerle karşı daha sıcak hissettirmiştir.

Öte taraftan, vize başvurusu resmi hazırlık sürecindeki endişe kaynaklarından bir diğeri olmuştur. Katılımcılar vizeye ciddi anlamlar yüklemiş ve hatta uçak biletlerini vizelerini aldıktan sonra almışlardır. Daha da kötüsü, sıkı bir vize süreci geçirmelerinden dolayı diğer Avrupa ülkeleri vatandaşlarına göre “ikinci sınıf insanlar” olarak hissetmişlerdir. Türk adaylar için vize alma gereksinimi aslında katılımcıların karşı toplumda görmekten çekindikleri önyargılara yönelik korkularını güçlendirmiştir.

Böylesi zorlu bir resmi sürecin sonucunda, her üç katılımcı birbirlerine karşı sıkı bir bağlılık geliştirmiş ve grup birlikteliği oluşturmuşlardır. Desteklendiklerini hissettikleri için katılımcılar grup birlikteliğini değerli olarak algılamış, ama aynı zamanda birlikteliğin abartılı bir endişeye yol açtığını ve planların herkesi memnun edecek şekilde yapıldığını belirtmişlerdir. Aynı ülkeden insanlarla yabancı bir ülkede bir arada bulunmak uluslararası değişim programı öğrencilerine uyum sürecinde faydalı gelebilir; fakat bu insanlara aşırı bağlılık yabancı bir kültüre ve topluma uyum açısından ciddi riskler oluşturmaktadır. Bu nedenle, gelecekteki katılımcıların grup birlikteliğinin artıları ve eksileri üzerine bilgilendirilmesi gerekmektedir. Son olarak, resmi hazırlık sürecinin en kritik yönü hazırlık sürecinin çoğunlukla resmi

konulara indirgenmesi eğilimi olmuştur. Bunun sonucunda da dil ve kültürel hazırlık bir yerde görmezden gelinmiştir.

Kaotik ve Göz Ardı Edilmiş Resmi Olmayan Bir Hazırlık Süreci

Her üç katılımcı görüşmeler sırasında en azından bir noktada İngiltere'deki dil ve kültürlerarası konulara hazırlık açısından bilgi ve farkındalık eksikliklerini belirtmişlerdir. Bu nedenle, gelecek kültürlerarası deneyimlerine yönelik bir hazırlık stratejisi ya da eylemini ifade etmekte başarısız olmuşlardır. Ayrıca, resmi olmayan hazırlık süreci açısından, sistematik ve sürekli bir süpervizyon eksikliğinden her zaman şikâyetçi olmuşlardır. Böylece, kaos içinde bir hazırlık dönemi tamamlamak zorunda kalmışlardır. Dil ve kültürel konulara hazırlanma konusundaki başarısızlığın ardındaki nedenler sorulduğunda ise belgeleri tamamlamak ve yaz okuluna katılmak zorunda oldukları için zaman bulamadıklarından yakınmışlardır.

Katılımcılar elbette resmi olmayan hazırlık sürecini tamamen görmemezlikten gelme eğiliminde olmamışlardır. Fakat böyle bir süreç hakkında yüzeysel bir anlayışa sahip olmuşlardır çünkü genellikle turistik ya da ülke çapında popüler konuları araştırma eğilimi göstermişlerdir. Bu nedenle, kısa vadeli uluslararası programların karmaşık doğasından dolayı bir hazırlık programı gereksinimi ortaya çıkmıştır. Resmi olmayan hazırlık sürecine ilişkin başka göze çarpan bir konu ise katılımcıların İngiliz aksanıyla aşinalıklarını arttırma arzusu olmuştur. Ancak, ilginç bir şekilde, açıkça İngilizce konuşma becerilerinde zorlandıklarını ifade etmelerine rağmen, İngilizce konuşma becerilerini geliştirme gereksinimlerini görmemezlikten gelmişlerdir. Bu yüzden, yaklaşmakta olan kültürlerarası deneyimlerin karmaşıklığını anlamaları ve bekleyen zorluklara hazır hissedebilmeleri açısından bu katılımcıların iyi tasarlanmış bir kültürel ve dil hazırlık programına maruz bırakılmaları kesinlikle gerekmiştir.

Hedef Kültürü İçeren ve Gelişen Kültürlerarası Dinamikler

Her şeyden önce, katılımcıların hepsi kendilerini açık fikirli ve farklı dünya görüşlerine karşı hoşgörülü olarak tanımlamıştır; ancak, kendi içlerinde milli ve dini kimlikler açısından farklılıklar göstermişlerdir. Nur ve Melek özellikle bu konuda benzer anlayışlar ve kimlikler sergilemişlerdir. Her ikisi de kendilerini "normal Türk

ve Müslüman" olarak tanımlayıp bazı milliyetçi, benmerkezci ve özcü eğilimleri öne çıkarmışlardır. Ayrıca, İngilizceyi öğrenmeyi ve öğretmeyi modern dünyada hayatta kalmak için bir zorunluluk olarak görüp bu dile daha fazla bir anlam yüklemeyi tercih etmemişlerdir. Bu temel değerlere güçlü bağlılık İngiltere’de yaşayacakları deneyimler önünde bir engel olabilir ki bu durum onların karşı kültürü gözlemleme ve turist olma planlarıyla birleşince daha da vahimleşiyor.

Nur ve Melek kesinlikle kendilerini hedef toplumda *meşru periferik katılımcı* olarak konumlandırmaktan kaçınmışlardır, bu nedenle bu durum onların yerel uygulamalara katılımında ve deneyimlerini maksimize etmede büyük bir engel olabilir. Bu İngilizce öğretmen adaylarının, aynı zamanda, yurtdışı eğitim deneyimlerinin otomatik olarak yararlılara dönüşmediğini fark etmeleri gerekmektedir. Öte yandan, Ece bir kültürü deneyimlemek için o kültürde gözlemci yerine katılımcı olması gerektiğinin farkında olmuştur ve bu nedenle yerel tartışmalara katılma niyetini ve hayali toplumunda bir katılımcı olacağını açıkça dile getirmiştir. Ece, ayrıca, Erasmus programının vaat ettiği kazançlara ulaşmak ve yalnızlığının üstesinden gelmek için hedef toplumdaki farklı topluluklardaki katılımlara özel bir anlam yüklemiştir. Bu amaçla, medyayı, siyaseti ve güncel olayları takip etmeyi planlayıp ülke geçmişi hakkında daha fazla bilgi öğrenme niyeti göstermiştir. O nedenle, Ece hedef toplumda kendisini meşru bir periferik katılımcı olarak konumlandırmıştır. Ancak, bir uygulama topluluğundaki kıdemli katılımcıların tutum ve uygulamaları da önem arz ettiği için (Lave & Wenger, 1991) katılım aramak demek aktif bir katılım anlamına gelmeyebilir; bu nedenle, bir uygulama topluluğundaki uygulamalar ortak inşa edilmekte ve karşılıklılık esas alınmaktadır. Hedef toplumdaki katılım planları açısından her ne kadar farklılıklar gösterebilirler de, katılımcıların hepsi bilgisizlikleri nedeniyle İngiltere’deki hayata dair basmakalıp bilgi ve görüşler dile getirmişlerdir. Bu tür fikirlerin kaynağı olarak da dil öğrenme geçmişlerini, öğretmen eğitimi derslerini, TV dizi ve filmlerini ve söylentileri göstermişlerdir. Yine, her ne kadar kültür hakkında basmakalıp görüşler sunsalar da, kendilerini bir kültürel hazırlığa kapatmayıp sadece bu konuda bilgisiz ve tecrübesiz olduklarını belirtmişlerdir.

Birbiriyle İlişkili Gelecek Odaklı Dinamik Düşünce Örüntüleri

Yaklaşan Erasmus deneyimi ile ilgili katılımcıların düşünce örüntüleri (motivasyonlar, beklentiler, planlar ve endişeler) dinamik faktörlerin karmaşık etkileşimi tarafından şekillenmiş ve katılımcılar arasında yakınlaşma ve farklılıklar göstermişlerdir; böylece, insan davranışlarının ve uluslararası programların karmaşık doğasını vurgulamışlardır. Bu doğrusal olmayan sistemik olgu ışığında, katılımcıların düşünce örüntüleri bu bölümün geri kalanında tek tek ele alınmıştır. Erasmus programına katılma kararının arkasındaki motivasyonlar incelendiğinde, katılımcıların benzer düşünce örüntülerine sahip olduğu görülmüştür. Katılımcıların ana motivasyonları; İngilizce iletişim becerilerini geliştirmek, CV zenginleştirmek ve İngiltere ve Avrupa Birliği genelinde seyahat etmek olmuştur. Motivasyonlarla ilgili ilginç nokta ise katılımcıların akademik çalışmalar ve eğlence arasında bir denge kurmak istemesi olmuştur; bu nedenle, karşı üniversitede alacakları derslere ortalama bir önem yüklemişler ve “kolay” dersleri alma eğilimine girmişlerdir. Bu şekilde, eğlence ve macera için daha fazla zaman ayırabileceklerini düşünmüşlerdir.

Katılımcılar aynı zamanda kendilerini yolda tutmak ve motivasyonlarının peşinden gidebilmek için bir dizi beklentiler geliştirmiştir. Her şeyden önce, kendilerine karşı olası bir önyargıdan çekindikleri için hedef toplumdan hoşgörölü ve samimi bir tavır beklentisi içine girmişlerdir. Potansiyel sosyalleşme alanları olarak da beklentilerini yurt, okul ve gezi ortamları olarak vermişlerdir. Ancak, katılımcılar kolayca arkadaş edinebilme konusunda ciddi şüpheler besledikleri için yerel halkın onlara iletişim için yaklaşması gerektiği eğilimine girmişlerdir; fakat, bunun sağlıklı bir iletişim kurma tekniği olmadığına farkına sonlara doğru varıp daha fazla girişken olma sözleri vermişlerdir. Her şey onların beklentileri doğrultusunda giderse eğer, Erasmus süreci sonunda sosyal ağlarını genişleteceklerine, İngilizce dil ve kültürlerarası becerilerini ilerleteceklerine ve dolayısıyla akıcı İngilizce konuşan birer İngilizce öğretmeni olacaklarına inanmışlardır. Dahası, ilerideki öğrencilerine anlatacak birçok anılar edineceklerine ve İngiliz aksanı ve kültürüne aşina olup kültürler arasında elçi olacaklarına inanmışlardır. Uzun vadede ise Erasmus

programının CV üzerindeki pozitif etkisine dayanarak işverenlerin kendilerine kapıları açacağını ummuşlardır.

Katılımcıların planları uluslararası deneyimlerinin farklı dönemleri için farklılıklar göstermiştir. Planlarını Erasmus öncesinde, sırasında ve sonrasında diye sınıflandırmak mümkündür. İngiltere'de yaşamaya başlamadan önceki planları basitçe İngiliz aksanına aşina olma ve İngiltere'de gezilecek yerleri araştırma olarak verilebilir. Aslında, katılımcılar bu basit Erasmus öncesi planları gerçekleştirmede bile başarısız olmuşlardır. Böylesi kısmi ve belirsiz hazırlıklar uluslararası deneyimlerden edinilebilecek faydaları riske atabilir çünkü adaylar bazen hedeflerini gerçekleştirmede başarısız olabilir ve hatta gerçekçi hedefler koymayı bile başaramayabilirler. Erasmus dönemi için yapılan planlara gelince, bütün katılımcılar daha girişken olma planları ve dolayısıyla İngiltere'deki sosyal ağlarını genişletmeyi ve iletişim ve kültürlerarası becerilerini geliştirmeyi amaçlamışlardır. İlginçtir, katılımcılar İngiliz aksanını edinmeyi planlamamışlar, bunun yerine birer İngilizce öğretmen adayı olarak aksanın farklı ve benzersiz yönlerini anlamayı planlamışlardır. Katılımcılar, aynı zamanda, İngiltere genelinde seyahat etmeyi ve parti ortamlarında çok zaman geçirmemeyi planlamışlardır. Yeni eğitim ortamına yönelik olarak ise dersleri minimum kıstaslarla karşılayıp geçmeyi planlamışlardır çünkü aksi takdirde eğlence ve maceraya yeterince zaman ayıramıyor olacaklarını belirtmişlerdir. Erasmus dönemi için yaptıkları planlar aynı zamanda Erasmus sonrası ve mezuniyet planları tarafından da şekillenmiştir. Bu uluslararası deneyim sonucunda bütün katılımcılar lisansüstü bir programı takip etmeyi ve iş piyasasında değer görmeyi ummuşlardır. Bu şekilde Erasmus kararının arkasındaki en önemli nedenlerden biri olarak iş imkânlarının artma olasılığını göstermişlerdir.

Bu planlara ek olarak, bu çalışmaya katılan İngilizce öğretmen adayları yaklaşan deneyimlerine yönelik bazı endişeler taşımışlardır. Bu endişeler yetersiz yaşam becerileri, İngilizce konuşma becerilerine düşük güven, bütün Erasmus dönemini Türkiye'den arkadaşlarla geçirme, İngiliz aksanını anlayamama, Türklere karşı önyargılarla karşılaşma, anadili İngilizce olan öğrencilerle aynı sınıf ortamını paylaşma, anadili İngilizce olan kişilerle konuşma korkusu, değişik yemek kültürü,

uyumsuzluk ve mali sorunlar olarak listelenebilir. Dahası, düşük sosyal beceriler ve kaynaşamama korkusu katılımcıların ciddi endişeleri arasında olmuştur. Ama en belirgin ve merkezi endişe Erasmus hedeflerinde başarısız olma olmuştur. Bu endişenin arkasındaki en büyük neden ise kendi perspektiflerinden düşük İngilizce iletişim ve sosyal becerileri olmuştur. Bu endişeler içinde en ilginç ise anadili İngilizce olan insanlarla konuşma korkusu olmuştur. Bu insanları dolaylı olarak daha yüksek ve güçlü bir konumda gördükleri için bir nevi Erasmus deneyimlerinin niteliğini riske atmışlardır.

TARTIŞMA VE SONUÇ

Bu çalışma bir uluslararası eğitim tecrübesi öncesinde bile bireysel tecrübelerin karmaşıklığını vurgulayarak üç benzersiz duruma tanıklık etmiştir. Bu çalışmadaki katılımcılardan elde edilen bulgular yurtdışı eğitim deneyimleri ile ilgili literatürde genellemelere karşı yapılan uyarıları doğrulamıştır (Coleman, 2013; Kinginger, 2015). Bu şekilde, bir kez daha bu tür uluslararası deneyimlerde bireyselliğin, karmaşıklıkların ve değişimlerin ön planda tutulması ve bu karmaşıklık arasında ana örüntüleri arama gerekliliği gösterilmiştir. Ayrıca, bu çalışmanın bulguları *kültürün* öğretmen eğitimi müfredatında yer alması gerektiğini güçlü bir şekilde göstermiştir; bu şekilde, *küresel öğretmenlik* anlayışının (Karaman & Tochon, 2007) öğretmen adaylarında gelişmesi ve uluslararası programlardan elde edilen edinimlerin arttırılması sağlanabilir. Yine bu çalışmada, öğretmen eğitimcilerinin ya da müfredatının adayların karar verme sürecinde etkili olmadığı gözlenmiştir. Bu durum uluslararasılaşma, kültürlerarası anlayış gibi güncel konuların katılımcıların bulunduğu öğretmen eğitimi bağlamında göz ardı edildiğine işaret etmektedir. Bu durum, aslında, uluslararasılaşma çalışmalarının yabancı olduğu bir durum değildir çünkü şu an Türkiye'deki İngilizce öğretmen eğitimi programları kültürlerarası iletişim yetkinliğini sağlayamadığı için ciddi eleştiriler almaktadır (Atay, 2005; Cepik & Polat, 2014); bu nedenle, bu tür programların müfredatlarını ve pratiklerini kültürlerarası ve uluslararasılaşma mevzuları açısından gözden geçirmeleri gerekmektedir.

Bütün katılımcıların İngilizce *dil sermayesini* tanınmasına ve İngiliz dilindeki gelişmiş becerilerin onlar için yeni sermaye türlerine ve artan iş umutlarına kapı olacağına inanmasına rağmen, iki katılımcı karşı topluma aktif bir katılımı gösteren güçlü göstergeleri sergileyememiş ve dolayısıyla hayali uygulama topluluklarında bir katılım tasavvur edememişlerdir. Hedef bağlamdaki yerel ve uluslararası uygulama topluluklarına katılım, anavatan ile zayıf ve karşı bağlamdaki yerel uygulamalarla güçlü bağlar, kültürlerarası zorluklarla yüzleşme, uyum problemlerinin üstesinden gelme gibi durumlar aslında hedef toplumda daha güçlü sosyal ağların kurulmasını ve bu şekilde dil ve kültürlerarası edinimlerin artmasını sağlayabilir (Dewey, Belnap & Hillstrom, 2013). Bu nedenle, katılımcıların gözlemci ya da turist olmanın onlara pek de fayda sağlamayacağını farkında olmaları gerekmektedir. Aksi takdirde, yurtdışındaki deneyimlerin en üst düzeyde verim ve edinim sağlaması zor olabilir. Diğer taraftan, Ece, bir anlamda, tasavvur ettiği hayali toplumunda bir katılımcı durumu kazanmak için fırsatlar yaratma peşinde olmuştur. Fakat Ece'nin durumunda göze çarpan durum ise bir rehberlik eksikliği olmuştur. Aksi takdirde, hedeflerine ulaşabilmesi için net hedefler ve stratejiler belirlemede zorlanmıştır ve aslında Ece çekingen yapısından dolayı yaklaşmakta olan zorluklara biraz da savunmasız bırakılmıştır. Böylesi bir durum da bu kadar katılımcı olmaya hevesli birisi için cesaret kırıcı olabilir. Diğer taraftan, bu çalışmadaki dil öğrencileri/öğretmen adayları kendilerini karşı toplumda “ikinci sınıf insan” olarak görme yatkınlığı gösterdiği ve ana dili İngilizce olan insanları daha güçlü bir pozisyonda konumlandıkları için karşı toplumdaki kıdemli katılımcıların da bir sorumluluk hissetmesi gerekmektedir. Bu nedenle, katılımcıların hedef toplumda aktif bir katılım gösterebilmeleri için daha hoşgörülü ve kapsayıcı bir tutumla karşılanmaları gerekmektedir (Pavlenko, 2003).

Genel olarak, bu çalışmada elde edilen bulgulara dayanarak gelecekteki katılımcıları kültürlerarası iletişim ve farkındalık için eğitime ihtiyacı ortaya çıkmıştır. Ayrıca, yurtdışı eğitim mezunları ve muhtemel değişim öğrencilerinin etkileşimlerini sağlayacak bir sosyal ağ organize etmek gelecekteki katılımcılar için önemli bir fayda sağlayabilir. Yine kurumlar arası iyi tanımlanmış bir denetim süreci ve

kurumlar/üniversiteler arasında gelişmiş bir işbirliği gelecekte yurtdışında kısa süreli eğitim alacak adayların başvuru ve hazırlık sürecini kolaylaştırıp daha verimli hale getirebilir. Aynı zamanda, karşı üniversiteler katılımcılara farklı uygulama topluluklarına tam katılım göstermeleri konusunda yardımcı olup dolayısıyla katılımcıların deneyimlerini üst düzeye çıkarmalarına ve optimize etmelerine ön ayak olabilir. Son olarak, katılımcılar dil öğretmen adayları olsalar bile, kültürlerarası iletişim faaliyetlerine dayalı dil hazırlık kursları da kısa süreli yurtdışı eğitim programları öncesinde adayların daha hazır hissetmesini sağlayabilir.

APPENDIX F: TEZ FOTOKOPİSİ İZİN FORMU

ENSTİTÜ

Fen Bilimleri Enstitüsü

☐

Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü

☒

Uygulamalı Matematik Enstitüsü

☐

Enformatik Enstitüsü

☐

Deniz Bilimleri Enstitüsü

☐

YAZARIN

Soyadı : Çiftçi

Adı : Emrullah Yasin

Bölümü : İngiliz Dili Eğitimi

TEZİN ADI (İngilizce): Preparation for an International Exchange Program:
A Phenomenological Analysis of Prospective English Language Teachers'
Lived and Imagined Experiences

TEZİN TÜRÜ : Yüksek Lisans

☒

Doktora

☐

Tezimin tamamından kaynak gösterilmek şartıyla fotokopi alınabilir.

☒

Tezimin içindekiler sayfası, özet, indeks sayfalarından ve/veya bir bölümünden kaynak gösterilmek şartıyla fotokopi alınabilir.

☐

Tezimden bir (1) yıl süreyle fotokopi alınamaz.

☐

TEZİN KÜTÜPHANEYE TESLİM TARİHİ: