

ERASMUS MOBILITY IN TURKEY: MOTIVATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS
OF HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS AT METU

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ABSTRACT

ERASMUS MOBILITY IN TURKEY: MOTIVATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS AT METU

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This study focuses on the pre-mobility phase of Erasmus Program participation and aims to understand the determinants of Erasmus Program participation of higher education students in the case of METU. Although there has been a steady rise in terms of the demand and participation in the program throughout its implementation in the country, the Erasmus phenomenon is a particularly under-researched subject in Turkey. From this perspective, this study attempts to provide a picture of the Erasmus Program participant profile at METU in terms of demographic, socio-economic and departmental characteristics of the applicants. Moreover, this study also aims to reflect on the interpretation of Erasmus Program by the participants and their motivations and expectations to participate in the program. A comprehensive online survey had been conducted to the applicant cohort of 2017 application period at METU which consisted of 1107 students. The survey resulted with the participation of 415 applicants and it was followed by semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 19 students whose applications to participate in the program had been successful. The research revealed that the Erasmus phenomenon in Turkey is a multi-faceted subject, which can be interpreted and analyzed through wider theoretical discussions on the concepts ranging from mobility and biography to key characteristics of socio-economic status of the participants, their demographic and departmental profiles and personal expectations from the program. The study also

revealed the effects of Turkey's domestic political context on students' drive to participate in Erasmus Program.

Keywords: Erasmus Program, Pre-mobility, Expectations, Migration, Youth

ÖZ

TÜRKİYE’DE ERASMUS HAREKETLİLİĞİ: ODTÜ ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN ERASMUS PROGRAMI’NA KATILMA ETKENLERİ

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Bu çalışma, Erasmus Programı’na katılım öncesi aşaması üzerine odaklanmakta ve ODTÜ örneğinde yükseköğretim öğrencilerinin Erasmus Program katılımının belirleyicilerini anlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Programın ülke çapında uygulanması sürecinde programa katılım ve talep yönünden istikrarlı bir artış olmasına rağmen, Erasmus fenomeni Türkiye için özellikle araştırılmamış bir konudur. Bu açıdan bakıldığında, bu çalışma, başvuruların demografik, sosyo-ekonomik ve akademik özelliklerine göre ODTÜ’de Erasmus Programı katılımcısı profilinin bir resmini sunmaya çalışmaktadır. Ayrıca, bu çalışma Erasmus Programı’nı katılımcılarının programa katılma motivasyonlarını ve beklentilerini yansıtmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu kapsamda ODTÜ’deki 2017 başvuru döneminde, 1107 öğrenciden oluşan başvuru grubuna kapsamlı bir çevrimiçi anket yapılmıştır. Anket, 415 öğrencinin katılımıyla sonuçlanmış ve bunu, programa başvuruları başarılı olan 19 öğrenciyle yapılmış yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine görüşmeler izlemiştir. Araştırma, Türkiye’deki Erasmus olgusunun, hareketlilik kavramından, katılımcıların demografik ve sosyo-ekonomik profillerine kadar geniş kapsamlı tartışmalar yoluyla yorumlanabileceği ve analiz edilebileceğini ortaya koymuştur. Çalışma, ayrıca, Türkiye’nin iç siyasi bağlamının öğrencilerin Erasmus Programı’na katılımları üzerindeki etkilerini ortaya koymayı hedeflemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Erasmus Programı, Hareketlilik, Beklentiler, Göç, Gençlik

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AKP	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)
ARCH	Department of Architecture
CE	Department of Civil Engineering
CENG	Department of Computer Engineering
CGPA	Cumulative Grade Point Average
CHP	Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party)
CRP	Department of City and Regional Planning
ECHE	Erasmus Charter for Higher Education
ELT	Department of English Language Teaching
EU	European Union
HDP	Halkların Demokratik Partisi (Peoples' Democratic Party)
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
ICO	International Cooperations Office
ID	Department of Industrial Design
IR	Department of International Relations
METU	Middle East Technical University
MHP	Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Movement Party)
PADM	Department of Political Science and Public Administration
PSY	Department of Psychology
SOC	Department of Sociology
STATS	Department of Statistics
TÜİK	Türk İstatistik Kurumu (Turkish Statistical Institute)
YSK	Yüksek Seçim Kurulu (Supreme Electoral Council of Turkey)
YÖK	Yükseköğretim Kurulu (Council of Higher Education)

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

My Erasmus journey started in 2012 as an undergraduate student, when I incidentally applied for a semester abroad under the influence of my close friend who had been planning to participate in the program since I first met her during my first year at METU. She was making her online application in front me and I thought; “why not giving it a chance”? Consequently, she went to Berlin and stayed one year there while I spent a semester in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

Five years later, in 2017, she is about to finish her Master’s degree at the very same university she spent her Erasmus period and I am writing my Master’s thesis on Erasmus Program while working full-time at METU International Cooperations Office as a “Mobility Specialist” who takes part in incoming and outgoing student exchange frameworks. Some consider Erasmus as a life changing experience, as in my case, it certainly changed mine to a certain extent as my life revolves around dealing with the Erasmus Program on different levels for the last three years. However, the particular focus of this study is not how participating in Erasmus Program influence one’s life trajectory, noting that it is more than a decent research topic for Turkey’s case. The aim of this study is to focus on the pre-mobility phase of Erasmus Program participation at METU by reflecting on the determinants of participation from students’ perspective along with their expectations from the program and future mobility plans.

What particularly inspired me to tackle this topic is the aspirations, strategies, and complex array of relations that are built around the Erasmus experience of individuals. “Going to Erasmus” becomes an important feature once the participants announce the news to friends and to the family. Participants’ Erasmus trajectories

usually involve many firsts in their lives. Reflecting on my experience as an undergraduate Erasmus participant; I went abroad for the first time within the framework of Erasmus Program. I purchased an online plane ticket, which I had never done before, as it was also my first flight experience. Moreover, I was the only person in my extended family that had gone abroad for a study period. It almost felt like a rite of passage; I was equipping myself with the necessary tools to engage with the world outside as a mobile and competent young individual, all of which became possible with the Erasmus Program. Before my travel to Slovenia, some of my extended family members and friends of the family gave a considerable amount of allowance to me, in foreign currency, and told me how proud of they were. Furthermore, it was easy to observe that my participation was something even more spectacular for my parents. My mother's first reaction, who at that time had no accounts on any platforms in social media, was to create Skype and Facebook accounts to maintain a sustainable communication line with me during my semester abroad. On the other hand, my father immediately started calculations for the possible economic support that they could provide to me for my exchange period. Overall, they were enthusiastic and flattered that I was going abroad for studying and they did not actually pay too much attention to my final destination. First, they had accomplished to send their child to METU, one of the leading universities in the country, and now they were sending him to Europe for educational purposes. On a final note, even my barber congratulated me, once I paid him a visit just before I left for the exchange semester, enthusiastically hinting about "the possibilities with the foreign girls". My friends were giving me bits of advice about how to fit in more in Europe and how I should make the most of my time there. That is to say, my attempt to spend a semester abroad within the framework of Erasmus Program quickly became a spectacle in my social setting.

After finishing my undergraduate degree, I was employed by METU to work at the institution's International Cooperations Office (ICO). During my time as a "Mobility Specialist" at METU ICO, I facilitated student mobility between METU and its partner institutions. I was also present in a considerable number of information

sessions for METU students before and during the Erasmus application periods as the representative of METU ICO that gives information to students and receives questions from them. Sharing the excitement of students whose applications had been successful is joyous, while it requires a highly sensitive approach to console the ones that failed to find themselves a vacancy in one of the partner institutions once the results were announced. However, the most challenging part as an international officer has been to interact with the parents who are unsatisfied with the selection results or who are taking part in their children's bureaucratic procedures such as the documentation for visa processes or completing the required paperwork before leaving for a semester abroad. One of the parents even found me on social media and continued asking questions about bureaucratic procedures and requirements on behalf of his daughter. Based on my personal and professional experiences, it is fair to argue that Erasmus Program is much more complex, challenging and exciting for some parents compared to students' perspective. For students, they are molded by the youth culture that encompasses travel, mobility, adventure as well as globalization. Moreover, they also have an idea about what awaits them in terms of their Erasmus experience at their destinations as Erasmus Program is also strongly embedded in the peer culture of higher education students. For parents on the other hand, the whole spectacle is much more unknown and corresponds not only to individual aspirations but also to the family's accomplishment and credentials.

As a "Mobility Specialist", I have, so far, personally involved in around 200 METU students' Erasmus procedures, before, during and after their mobility phases; a time span which roughly lasts around 1 year. During these encounters, I started to ask more questions to students about their feelings and perceptions about their Erasmus experience. I tried to engage more as a person to understand the efforts made by the students and their families in this process. Especially after hearing a story from one of the students, whom I had been facilitating their mobility processes, about how her parents were taking a bank loan to facilitate her exchange period, I realized that the Erasmus phenomenon in Turkey deserves further scholarly attention. There were times, as an employee, that I found it hard to cope with the demands from students

and parents. As a sociologist on the other hand, this was a substantial and thought-provoking scene. After having realized the possibility of constructing my research in this field, my perception of the events that I witnessed had also changed during my day-to-day job, as my engagement in the process started feeling more like participant observation. In other words, my office life turned into my sociological field. As Jorgensen argues;

The methodology of participant observation is appropriate for studies of almost every aspect of human existence. Through participant observation, it is possible to describe what goes on, who or what is involved, when and where things happen, how they occur, and why—at least from the standpoint of participants—things happen as they do in particular situations. The methodology of participant observation is exceptional for studying processes, relationships among people and events, the organization of people and events, continuities over time, and patterns, as well as the immediate sociocultural contexts in which human existence unfolds. (2008, p. 12).

After advancing my studies on this topic and being able to shape a research design, I realized that I found myself in a somewhat unique position to study what I felt a sociologically significant phenomenon. That is to say, I was an insider to this phenomenon as a former participant and as an employee who deals with Erasmus Program in day-to-day activities. On the other hand, I could also turn my personal experience into a sociological body of work by using the necessary tools and sociological framework as a graduate student in the field of Sociology. From this perspective, I find my position as a researcher close to Andrew Abbott's conceptualization of lyrical sociology. Abbott (2007), in his influential work "Against Narrative: A Preface to Lyrical Sociology", opposes to narrative sociology which he describes as "standard quantitative inquiry with its 'narratives' of variables as well as those parts of qualitative sociology that take a narrative and explanatory approach to social life" (p. 67). In contrast, he develops the concept of lyrical sociology as follows;

Lyrical sociology is characterized by an engaged, non-ironic stance toward its object of analysis, by specific location of both its subject and its object in social space, and by a momentaneous conception of social time. Lyrical sociology typically uses strong figuration and personification, and aims to communicate its author's emotional stance toward his or her object of study, rather than to 'explain' that object. (Abbott, 2007; p. 67)

To illustrate, international student mobility in general and Erasmus Program in particular has become a massive industry in recent years with millions of individuals involved in it. This phenomenon could easily be reduced to simply quantitative and structural approaches when studied. In fact, a considerable part of the literature on these issues are employing macro-scale analyzes and ignores the personalized experiences and meanings. On the other hand, it is also possible to analyze Erasmus Program from a Eurocentric perspective by focusing on European identity or creation of a highly skilled European work force in line with the EU's ambitious policy-making agenda in the case of Erasmus Program.

However, from a personal perspective, this study started with curiosity rather than pre-conceived ideas regarding the determinants of Erasmus Program participation at METU. The main concerns here were to understand participant profile in the Erasmus Program at METU and to reflect on the experiences of students during the pre-mobility phase of their Erasmus Program participation. That is why, this research requires us to go beyond these narratives and make an attempt to note down what the students, as the main actors in this case, go through in this specific time and location. With a context of its own, the Erasmus phenomenon in Turkey has its unique elements that will be covered with a lyrical approach to the objects of analysis of this research. As a researcher, I find the source of inspiration and drive in my personal exposure to Erasmus Program, which I consider to be an important dimension of this study and a value in sociological terms.

Maxwell (2013) argues that there are four main sources for conceptualizing a framework for one's study. He lists these main sources as experiential knowledge, existing theory and research, pilot and exploratory research and thought experiments.

Among these sources, he favors experiential knowledge as the most important conceptual resource. He notes that “separating your research from other aspects of your life cuts you off from a major source of insights, hypotheses, and validity checks” (p. 45). Moreover, C. Wright Mills (1959) also argued that;

The most admirable scholars within the scholarly community . . . do not split their work from their lives. They seem to take both too seriously to allow such dissociation, and they want to use each for the enrichment of the other. (p. 195)

At this point it is important to note that I have no such claim to join “the most admirable scholars within the scholarly community” in a sole attempt by this study, but as illustrated above, that researchers’ experience has an important role to play in any scholarly work.

Going back to Erasmus Program, after the Helsinki Summit in 1999, Turkey’s status was recognized as a candidate country destined to join the European Union. This paved the way for Turkey to participate in educational programs of the European Union, such as Erasmus Program, as member and candidate states do. In 2003, when the pilot implementation of the Erasmus Program started in Turkey, 128 students from 15 higher education institutions participated in the scheme (TR Ministry for EU Affairs, 2013). Since then, more than 100.000 higher education students in Turkey participated in the Erasmus Program to study abroad at least for a semester. The number higher education institutions that possess ECHE (Erasmus Charter for Higher Education) which allows institutions to take part in the program have risen from 15 to 164 in 2016 (TR National Agency, 2016). In 2013-2014 academic year, Turkey became the fifth country behind Spain, Germany, France and Italy that sent the most number of students for a study period abroad within the framework of Erasmus Program (European Commission, 2014). Furthermore, in the same academic year, Turkey was the second top sending country in terms of staff mobility for teaching and training assignments behind Poland. On a final note, when compared to the figures in the academic year 2007-2008 (start of Lifelong Learning

Program¹), the number of students participated in the Erasmus Program from Turkey has risen 112% by the 2013-2014 academic year (European Commission, 2014). These figures show how Erasmus Program quickly established itself in Turkey with the promise of mobility in Europe and how it received recognition from the higher education circles, from academic and administrative staff to students.

Moreover, it is also important to note that, as a flagship initiative of the European Union, Erasmus Program is strongly built on a policy-making mindset that aims to promote European identity among European youth and to create a highly skilled European work force. As Gonzalez et al. (2010) argue;

Over the last three decades the EU has carried out an ambitious attempt to integrate HEIs from member countries with the purpose of enhancing a high-skilled labour force, promote deeper cultural integration and contribute to build a sense of European identity. The Erasmus program supported financially by the EU has played a key role in these objectives, increasing quite considerably student mobility flows. (p. 427)

However, in the case of Turkey, this research takes place at time when the public support for Turkey's EU membership at its lowest point in the history with 45%, while only 27% believe that Turkey may become a member state in the EU in the future (Türkiye Sosyal-Siyasal Eğilimler Araştırması, 2016). Therefore, it is possible to argue that the participation in the program becomes a distinct practice for many, as the demand for Erasmus Program is still very high from Turkey's side as things stand.

From this perspective, this study aims to reflect on the motivations and expectations of higher education students in Turkey to participate in the Erasmus Program in the case of METU by focusing on the participants' pre-mobility phase. In addition to understanding the motivations and expectations of the students, this research also

¹ Lifelong Learning Program (LLP) was the European Union program for education and training that lasted between 2007 and 2013. LLP was replaced by Erasmus+ Program in 2014. The further analysis of the history and implementation of European Union's educational programs will be made in the next chapter of this study.

attempts to provide a picture of the participant profile of the program in terms of demographic, socio-economic and departmental characteristics of the students who apply to benefit from the program. Moreover, reflecting on the social and personal interpretation of the Erasmus experience for students as well as relocating the students' perception of Erasmus Program participation in the social and political context in Turkey are also important aspects of this research. In light of the framework presented above, this study also attempts to capture students' future mobility plans as it is possible to argue that Erasmus Program participation can be considered as a source for mobility capital that is to be utilized throughout students' life course.

Although there has been a steady rise in terms of demand and participation in the program throughout its implementation in the country, the Erasmus phenomenon is particularly under-researched in Turkey, especially from a sociological perspective. This study aims to go beyond numerical data regarding the Erasmus Program in Turkey and approaches the student mobility as a complex phenomenon in which many determinants are at play ranging from students' future migration aspirations to their parents' financial and emotional involvement in the decision to participate in the program. This approach would allow this study to cover students' Erasmus trajectories starting from their initial application to their pre-mobility phase. It can be argued that the youth culture acknowledges mobility and adventures almost anywhere in the world. However, considering the Erasmus experiences of Turkish students in terms Turkey's longstanding and complicated relationship with the "West", the country's current domestic political environment and familial practices where parents play an important part in many young individuals' life course, participating in this program becomes loaded with many practices and experiences on many different levels. Erasmus Program participation is a unique and new experience for many students as the program is almost the only opportunity for many to have a significant study experience in another country abroad. Historically, there is no experience in Turkey's higher education system that could match what the Erasmus framework offers now. This created a new experience for higher education

students who became able to share a collective memory with their peers as the program turned into an important component of peer group socialization.

At this point, it is important to note that the scope of this research is limited to METU, which is a leading public university in Turkey where only the top 1% percent of students who take university entrance exam is admitted (METU, 2017). Moreover, due to its historical and political background, the institution has also a symbolic significance among the secular and leftist sections of the Turkish society. While an analysis of METU's historical background and political significance in Turkey will be elaborated later on, due to the components listed above, it is expected that the sample of this study would be homogenous in terms of students' socio-economic background and demographic characteristics as well as their political attitude. Therefore, while this study does not provide a ground for any kind of comparative perspective with other higher education institutions in Turkey, it can still be considered as a significant attempt in regard to being one of the pilot studies concerning Erasmus Program in Turkey, especially in the field of Sociology. That is why a descriptive approach will inevitably be adopted to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Erasmus phenomenon in the case of METU.

The second chapter of this study will cover the contextualization of the research. An overview of the historical and political background of METU will be provided. Moreover, the domestic political context of Turkey will be briefly explained. The contextualization will be followed by the history and scope of Erasmus Program, including the European Union's policy-making agenda. A wider picture of the student exchange scene at METU will be covered in order to comprehend the structure in which METU students make the decision to participate in Erasmus Program. The institutional body at METU and the way international exchange programs are operated will be explained. Finally, the available international exchange schemes at METU will be introduced.

In the third chapter, the research problem will be explained in detail. Moreover, the research design and methodology will also be presented in the same chapter. The research methods used in this study will be covered and data collection methods will be presented. Finally, along with a discussion on international student mobility in terms of the determinants of Erasmus Program participation, the terminological differentiation will be made and definition of the key concepts will be provided.

The fourth chapter will cover the empirical data that had been gathered within the scope of this research. First, the analysis will focus on the survey data to define the sample of this research and to elaborate on the key characteristics of Erasmus Program applicants at METU. The socio-economic, demographic and departmental profiles of the applicants will be provided. In addition to these key characteristics, participants' main expectations and motivations regarding Erasmus Program participation will be covered. That is to say, the survey data will be utilized to provide a structural analysis. Secondly, the interview data gathered from the in-depth interviews will be used for micro-level analysis to highlight the pre-mobility phase experiences of applicants and their interpretation of Erasmus Program participation.

The fifth and the final chapter will cover the summary of the findings of this research. Moreover, the strengths and weaknesses and the reflection on future studies regarding this topic will be included in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 2

CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE RESEARCH

2.1 The Research Venue; METU and the Domestic Political Context in Turkey

The research venue of this study, Middle East Technical University (METU), located in Ankara, is a public university, in which the language of instruction is English, and it is one of Turkey's leading universities in terms of academic achievement, as well as the depth and breadth of international ties (METU, 2017). Built in 1956, as part of Turkey's second modernization attempt at that time, METU has usually been considered as a society in regard to its campus life (Sargin and Savaş, 2012). Moreover, the institution earned itself a significant recognition in the political scene of the country as it is one of the important symbols for the leftist movement in Turkey since it contained highly active political student organizations especially during the 1960's and 1970's where the METU campus was considered as a bastion for the leftist movement during that time. Thus, as Lüküslü (2016) argues, the student body at METU is known by its leftist background and attitude.

While it can be argued that the highly politically active student body at METU during 1960's and 1970's has changed over the years in line with the domestic and global political climate, the institution has not lost its symbolic value in Turkey's leftist and secular circles in the current political context of the country. As discussed previously, it is possible to argue that the student population at METU can be considered as a homogenous group in terms of students' socio-economic and demographic characteristics. It is possible to argue that this homogeneity applies to the political orientations of the students as well.

To provide a brief overview of the political attitude of METU students, and where this attitude stands in the domestic political context of the country, the voting patterns of METU students in the last two countrywide elections in Turkey are worth mentioning and can be considered as a valuable insight to the contextualization of this study.

The mentioned elections are the Parliamentary election on November 1, 2015 and the Presidential referendum on April 16, 2017. A considerable number of METU students who reside at the campus dormitories voted in these elections at the ballot boxes which are exclusively established for the residents at METU campus. The electoral results of these ballot boxes make it possible to capture the voting patterns of METU students in these elections. From this perspective, Table 1 below compares the results of the ballot boxes² (a total of 1653 votes) at METU with the overall results of the Parliamentary election in Turkey that took place on November 1, 2015, including only the four biggest political parties;

Table 1 Comparison of November 2015 Parliamentary Election Results (METU and Overall results)

Venue	Political Party Voting Percentage			
	CHP	MHP	HDP	AKP
METU	64,9%	5,1%	21,9%	4,9%
Turkey	25,3%	11,9%	10,8%	49,5%

Source: Supreme Electoral Council of Turkey (YSK) (2017)

As shown in the table, there is a significant difference between the election results at METU and in Turkey in general. The difference is most evident in terms of the score between conservative and nationalist political parties (AKP as the ruling party and MHP) and center-left and leftist parties who identify themselves as secular (CHP and

² The ballot box numbers at METU for November 2015 Parliamentary Election are as follows; 4462, 4463, 4464, 4465, 4466

HDP). Moreover, it is important to note that while the ruling party AKP received almost the half of the overall votes in Turkey, its score at METU is the lowest with only 4,9%. The picture above is a good indicator of the political orientations of METU students. Furthermore, it also illustrates where METU can be located in the political imagery of the country.

On the other hand, in regard to the results of the referendum for presidential system that took place on April 16, 2017, the voting pattern of METU is even more dramatically different when compared to overall referendum results in Turkey. Below, Table 2 illustrates the comparison of the Presidential referendum results at METU³ (a total of 2604 votes) with the overall results in Turkey;

Table 2 Comparison of April 2017 Presidential Referendum Results (METU and Overall results)

Vote for Presidential System		
Venue	Yes	No
METU	5%	95%
Turkey	51,41	48,59%

Source: Supreme Electoral Council of Turkey (YSK) (2017)

The presidential referendum marks a very significant breakthrough in Turkey's political history in terms of moving away from the founding ideology that emphasizes parliamentary system and separation of powers as a political principle. First proposed by AKP, in an attempt to consolidate its political power, the presidential system was also endorsed by MHP. In contrast, CHP and HDP strongly opposed this system and campaigned against it during the referendum period. As the overall results show, while the reaction to this new political system is highly

³ The ballot box numbers at METU for April 2017 Presidential Referendum are as follows; 4426, 4427, 4428, 4429, 4430, 4431, 4432

polarized in Turkey, the referendum result at METU signals a strong opposition which is not evident in the general public opinion in Turkey.

Considering the voting patterns presented above, it is possible to argue that METU students' political orientations can be distinguished significantly from the political conjecture of the country. However, focusing on only the last two of the countrywide election results in the country would be seriously insufficient to cover the domestic political environment in Turkey and METU students' position in that particular context. To illustrate, the current ruling party AKP which came to power in 2002, has been ruling the country for the last 15 years, increased its vote share throughout the years in each of last 4 parliamentary elections (2002, 2007, 2011 and 2015) so far. As Özbudun (2013) argues, this political dominance qualifies AKP to be considered as the predominant party in the country. Thus, AKP leadership started to adopt an increasingly conservative and majoritarian attitude which most strongly illustrated itself by the Islamic references in the political discourse (Özbudun, 2014). To illustrate, as Lüküslü (2016) argues, after 2011 which is marked by the start of AKP's third term in power, it is possible to observe the construction of a new youth myth in Turkey by the state actors as an Islamic conservative one with the introduction of the term "pious" generation. A new national identity is aimed to be constructed around conservative values and it is possible to argue that there is a great political tension between the state and almost anyone who does not embrace these values. Consequently, some young people who became overwhelmingly distressed in this context find themselves stigmatized, alienated and insecure in the political context of the country.

It is important to note that, the vast majority of the applicants in this research are from the post-1990 generation who spent a significant period of their lives under AKP regime and witnessed the transformation of the country they were born in. Especially from 2013 onwards, starting with the Gezi movement where peaceful protests against an urban management project in Taksim square in İstanbul turned into a massive, nation-wide protests led mainly by students, marked a new era in

Turkey's domestic political context dominated by the political polarization of the society. Göle (2013) argues that Gezi protests were a reaction to the shrinking and suffering public space which was a product of the long-term AKP rule. On the other hand, along with the political struggles presented above, Turkey also suffered enormously from terror attacks in the recent years, starting with 2015, resulting from regional and national conflicts such as the wars in Iraq and Syria and the breakdown of Kurdish peace process as Akkoyunlu and Öktem (2016) argue. Big cities in Turkey, especially İstanbul and Ankara⁴ had been targeted several times by the terror attacks which resulted in many casualties and a great tension in the society as the attacks took place in public squares and city centers in these cities. Finally, on July 15, 2016, a failed coup attempt took place in Turkey as a clique in Turkish military attempted to overthrow the AKP government and President Erdoğan. According to Human Rights Watch World Report (2017),

The attempted coup left at least 241 citizens and government law enforcement dead. During the attempted coup fighter jets bombed Turkey's parliament. In the aftermath, the government declared a state of emergency, jailed thousands of soldiers and embarked on a wholesale purge of public officials, police, teachers, judges, and prosecutors. (p. 600)

The aftermath of the coup attempt has shaped Turkey's domestic political context as the declared state of emergency has been extended several times and the increasingly authoritarian government passed decrees without any parliamentary supervision or control.

According to Neyzi (2001, p. 413), the term generation can be defined as "an age cohort with a shared historical experience". From this perspective, it can be argued that a certain part of the post-1990 generation, which the sample of this study can be

⁴ Between 2015 and 2016, Ankara had been hit 3 times by terror attacks. On October 2015, two suicide attacks targeted the leftist, pro-Kurdish HDP rally and resulted with 102 casualties. On February 2016, a vehicle loaded with explosive targeted military officials nearby Kızılay, as their busses pass by and 28 people lost their lives. Finally, on March 2016, a car bomb was exploded in Kızılay-Güvenpark, a public square at the city center and 37 people died in the attack, including 2 METU students. The frequent and deadly attacks caused a big devastation and trauma among the society.

considered as a part of it in the case of METU, is mainly marked by their discontent with domestic political developments. It is in this context that the consolidated political attitude of METU should be reconceptualized as a reflection of the struggling leftist, liberal and secular segments of Turkey in the political context of the country. Consequently, it is possible to argue that the empirical data in this study is strongly influenced and shaped by the context presented above. According to Sirkeci (2005, p. 199);

In contexts where there is a blatantly uneven distribution of political power, there will be, understandably, some groups who are left feeling unhappy and deprived. The reactions of members of these groups often involve making strategic decisions, including aligning with the dominant groups, refusing and opposing them, or emigration.

Therefore, this research considers the struggles of METU students in the political conjecture of Turkey as one of the determinants of Erasmus Program participation. Although Erasmus mobility covers a short period and includes a high probability of return, it is possible to argue that Erasmus Program presents itself as an “escape route” for many students who feel overwhelmed in the country’s domestic political context.

2.2 Erasmus Program

As discussed previously, Turkey’s direct participation in the EU’s educational programs became possible in 1999, after Helsinki Summit when Turkey’s status was recognized as a candidate country destined to join the European Union. However, there is a vast history behind the EU’s approach to education in which the Erasmus framework has emerged within. It is important to locate Erasmus Program at the EU’s policy-making level in historical terms, as this approach would provide a picture of the official mindset regarding the notion of mobility within Europe.

Erasmus Program originally takes its name from the 15th Century Dutch philosopher Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) who lived and worked in several countries in

Europe in pursuit of knowledge and experience. However, the project's name Erasmus is also a backronym for "EuROpean Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students". Although the program was first intended to start in 1981, it was only after 1987 the official implementation of Erasmus Program began. It was merged into the Socrates Program in 1994 and into the Socrates II in 2001. In 2007, it became a part of the Lifelong Learning Program, along with projects of Grundtvig, Comenius, and Da Vinci which aimed to integrate educational programs with vocational ones. The Lifelong Learning Program was replaced by Erasmus+ Program in 2014. However, one should go further back in the history of policy-making agenda of the European Union to understand the process behind the emergence of Erasmus Program. That is to say, the program emerged within this historical context as a response to specific challenges and goals set by the EU.

The first initiatives on education in European Union's history can be traced back to the Treaty of Rome (1957) in regard to the remarks on higher education in Europe. However, the area of education drew considerably less interest for a long time for the policy makers on the supranational level. This was mainly due to the fact that it was considered as a policy which carried national tendencies. Batory and Lindstorm (2011) argue that, along with tax and immigration policies, education has been considered as one of the last domains of the national sovereignty in spite of the European Union's ambitious attempts for European integration at many levels. Therefore, for almost two decades after the Treaty of Rome, education and training were minor topics with a restricted attention concerning the recognition of qualifications and the promotion of cooperation between the Member States in basic and advanced vocational training (Davies, 2003). However, it was the decrease in the employment rates in the 1970's in Europe, especially among the youth that attracted European Commission to initiate more comprehensive and direct educational policies in Europe. The youth employment was the priority for this initiative. Consequently, the Action Program in the Field of Education was launched in 1976. According to Gornitzka (2007), this program was a milestone in the policy area of education since it signaled institutionalization with an organizational capacity and budgetary support

for the education policy. Moreover, The Single European Act in 1985 was another important turning point for education policy of the EU. As Corbett (2008) points out The Single European Act was a strong indicator of European Commission's intentions to promote cooperation in the education area among the Member States in terms of mobilizing and equipping the European youth who had been believed to be the future of the European Community by thinking in European terms. The aftermath of The Single European Act in 1985 was fruitful as it provided a ground for the emergence of programs in the field of education such as Erasmus (higher education), Comenius (school education), and Petra (vocational education). Furthermore, the implication of "thinking in European terms" was a paradigm change in the policy-making agenda of the European Commission, as it signaled the realization of the potential for the comprehensive educational programs especially in higher education for Europe. This approach from the EU in terms of promoting the European identity among the European youth had been strongly supported by the utilization of educational programs. As Mitchell (2015) argues, mobile European students who experience another country during their study periods have the chance to interact with other Europeans. It is possible to argue that the EU considers this feature of student mobility as an important tool to promote European identity by providing a ground for individuals from all over European countries to get together, which would a shared sense of community. Moreover, it is expected that international mobility would enhance human capital of students and create international networks leading better understanding of different cultures (Oosterbeek and Webbink, 2009).

On the other hand, the Memorandum on Higher Education in the European Community in 1991 was another important milestone in the field of education, particularly in the higher education area. According to Hake (1999);

This Memorandum made ambitious proposals for universities to 'support an expanding knowledge-based economy'. It proposed that universities should contribute to the 'single labour market for highly qualified personnel', widen access to higher qualifications, offer opportunities for regular updating and renewal of knowledge and skills, and ensure that research contributed to technological renewal through the formation of 'partnerships with economic life'. (p. 59)

Thus, the direct connection between the policy areas of education and employment was established in the field of higher education. In addition to the discussion so far, the emergence of the concept of social exclusion with the Treaty of Maastricht (1992) and the structural approach to tackle this notion also fueled up the efforts by the EU to focus on education in many aspects. Davies (2003) argues that the introduction of the narrative on social exclusion led to the designation of programs and policies in regard to the promotion of European citizenship and a focus on cultural education, equal opportunities themes targeting particularly disadvantaged groups. Therefore, the concept of lifelong learning programs was introduced in 1995 as the “White Paper Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society” was presented by the European Commission. Consequently, 1996 was also another important year for the evolution of education policies as it was announced as the European Year of Lifelong Learning which accelerated the effect of lifelong learning Programs. Mitchell (2006) argues that the initiation of the lifelong learning programs led to an integrating strategy that involves a variety of important European institutions, and the concept of lifelong learning was integrated into the employment chapter of the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997. However, it was the Bologna Declaration (1999) that led to a significant structural change especially in terms of promoting student mobility within Europe. According to Teichler (2015), Bologna Declaration made it possible to establish a common ground for study programs and degrees in Europe by the introduction of a credit system, recognition of credentials by diploma supplements and quality assurance cooperation. It is possible to argue that higher education in Europe, especially in terms of internationalization and student mobility, owes much to the Bologna Process as it contributed significantly to the institutionalization of the educational programs of the EU, especially the Erasmus Program.

When first introduced in 1987, the goals for the Erasmus Program were set in line with the EU’s social, political and economic ambitions. Students exposure to another EU Member State, European citizenship, qualified workforce and cooperation among

the Member States were expected from the implementation of the program In the Council Decision of 1987 (p. 21) it was stated that;

The objectives of the Erasmus Program shall be as follows:

- (i) to achieve a significant increase in the number of students...spending an integrated period of study in another Member State, in order that the Community may draw upon an adequate pool of manpower with first-hand experience of economic and social aspects of other Member State
- (ii) to strengthen the interaction between citizens in different Member States with a view to consolidating the concept of a People's Europe
- (iii) to ensure the developments of a pool of graduates with direct experience of intra-Community cooperation, thereby creating the basis upon which intensified cooperation in the economic and social sectors can develop at the Community level.

Today, Erasmus is one of the most widely known, if not the most famous, student exchange programs in the world. According to Teichler et al. (2001), the program is the most popular student mobility framework at the European level. Erasmus+ is an umbrella name for all educational programs governed by the European Union. In the Erasmus+ Program Guide (European Commission, 2017) the program is described as follows;

Erasmus+ is the EU Program in the fields of education, training, youth and sport for the period 2014-2020. Education, training, youth and sport can make a major contribution to help tackle socio-economic changes, the key challenges that Europe will be facing until the end of the decade and to support the implementation of the European policy agenda for growth, jobs, equity and social inclusion. (p. 5)

The European Commission is the responsible body for managing Erasmus+ Program in terms of managing its budget, setting priorities and goals (European Commission, 2017). As mentioned above, it is a massive project involving the European Union's objectives on several specifically assigned topics. In order to achieve these objectives, Erasmus+ Program implements several "Key Actions"; namely, Key Action 1 that involves mobility of individuals, Key Action 2 which deals with cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices, Key Action 3 for

support for policy reform, Jean Monnet to support academic activities regarding the EU and its policies and finally, the program also includes the Sport section to tackle the issues of doping, match fixing or protecting minor and non-profit European sport events (European Commission, 2017).

The particular interest in this study is on Erasmus+ Key Action 1 which includes mobility of learners and staff. Erasmus program mentioned in this study refers to Key Action 103 student mobility that corresponds to a study period in a program country which lasts minimum 3 and maximum 12 months (European Commission, 2017). Erasmus+ Program also offers traineeship or work placement support for students, but this aspect of the program will not be included in the discussion as it covers a shorter period than learning mobility and students mostly utilize traineeship mobility with strong career orientations. However, for the terminological use of the term, this study opts for Erasmus Program as participants also tend to refer to the framework as such rather than using Erasmus+ Key Action 1 Mobility of Learners and Staff.

On the other hand, from another perspective, the EU's educational policies are also criticized in terms of promoting brain-drain. As Teichler (2015) argues, while the internationalization of higher education through mobility of individuals have positive aspects such as providing cultural enrichment, mutual understanding, personality development and academic quality, it is also possible to argue that it promotes brain-drain from developing periphery countries to the countries at the center. The term brain-drain is first conceptualized to frame the immigration of researchers to the United States during the 1950s and it can be briefly described as the "net outflow of persons from one country to another" (Wächter, 2006; p. 51). However, as Robertson (2006) argue, from the perspective of policy-makers at the center countries, the attempt is to lure the most qualified individuals in the world to make innovations and profits. Therefore, it is possible to argue that there is a dark side of international mobility which may dramatically influence the developing countries who face the risk of losing their highly-skilled work force. Thus, the mobility of students and

researchers can be considered as the circulation of human capital which can be argued that the EU treats as an economic value within the scope of its educational programs including Erasmus. According to Wächter (2006), the debates about brain-drain in the EU's context became most evident during the EU's enlargement to the Eastern European and the former Soviet Union countries as significant mobility flows took place from these countries to Central and Western Europe.

While it can be argued that the EU mobility programs cover short-term mobility of individuals and the participants are expected to return back, it is fair to argue that the EU uses these programs as a soft power in the region. However, as Altbach and Teichler (2001) argue, the main motivation to participate in exchange programs and international studies is usually the long-term migration plans. For this study, which aims to reflect on students' expectations and motivations to participate in Erasmus Program, it can be argued that the inclusion of the brain-drain debate is significant. However, as the focus of this study is on the pre-mobility phase, the actual reflections on the brain-drain aspect of Erasmus Program mobility can only be made through further longitudinal studies. Still, it is important to note that Turkey has a significant history of losing high-skilled work force to Western countries, particularly to Germany and the USA. Sunata (2011) traces this particular phenomenon back to the 19th century, to Ottoman Empire's modernization attempts, and argues that the flows of the highly-skilled work force from Turkey to Germany is still evident in the 2000s. On the other hand, Güngör and Tansel (2008) who consider the emigration of doctors and engineers to Europe 1960's as the first wave of highly-skilled émigrés from Turkey, argue that the patterns of brain-drain from Turkey became most evident throughout the years in the emigration of non-returning students who study abroad.

2.3 The Institutional Body at METU

A wider picture of the student exchange scene at METU is required in order to comprehend the structure in which METU students make the decision to participate in Erasmus Program. As discussed in HEFCE (2004), institutional attitude toward

exchange programs is considered as one of the important driving (or constraining in some cases) factors influencing international student mobility. According to HEFCE (2004), institutional and staff approach to mobility as well as having a specific policy or strategic plan referring to student mobility and internationalization are significant institutional aspects affecting student mobility. When taking a look at the last three of the METU Strategic Plans, 2005-2010, 2011-2016 and 2017-2021 (template version 3), it is possible to see a direct reference to endorsement of exchange programs to METU students in order to encourage them to spend a part of their curricula abroad in METU Strategic Plan 2005 (METU SP 2005), while METU Strategic Plan 2011-2016 (2011) puts the emphasis on exchange frameworks in order to attract incoming qualified students. Finally, in the third working template of the METU Strategic Plan 2017-2021 (2017), it is possible to observe that there is a trend towards utilization of exchange mobility to institution's benefit in terms of incoming and outgoing student and staff flows.

Student exchange operations at METU are conducted by International Cooperations Office (ICO) with the support of departmental exchange coordinators. Each department at METU has a departmental exchange coordinator assigned among one of the staff members to take part in student mobility procedures, especially in terms of academic guidance such as advising students for the selection of courses at the host university and finding the equivalent of those courses in METU's curriculum. METU ICO was founded in 1992 to facilitate international mobility programs and inter-institutional collaborations by taking over the responsibility from the Registrar's Office. That is to say, there is a strong and rooted organization towards international engagement at METU.

Each year, usually in early February, ICO opens applications for available student exchange schemes for the next academic year. Once the application period ends, the students take an English proficiency exam prepared by the Department of Basic English at METU. This is followed by ICO collecting and evaluating the applications

and announcing final results. The selection of students is based on the overall score obtained by the applicants in terms of their CGPA and English proficiency exam.

CGPA and English proficiency exam have equal influence on the overall score as they are included in calculation %50-%50. However, there is also a coefficient that is applied to students' CGPA to favor the students whose CGPAs are higher than their counterparts at their departments. That is to say, applicants' academic success in terms of their CGPAs are compared with their peers who are in the same department and at the same year and applicants who have a CGPA higher than their peers are rewarded with extra points. Also, due to recent arrangements by the Turkish National Agency, students with disabilities and students who are the children of martyrs⁵ and war veterans receive 10 points extra to their overall score. On the other hand, former beneficiaries who participated in the program in the same study cycle receive 10 points deduction. Only after the 2014-2015 academic year, the participation of former beneficiaries of Erasmus Program for another study period became possible. The same participant may benefit from Erasmus Program for maximum 12 months in each study cycle.

The minimum CGPA requirement for applying to exchange programs at METU is having a CGPA of 2.50 or higher. That is to say, undergraduate students who are considering to apply for Erasmus program must have at least 2.50 CGPA and graduate students should have at least 3.00 CGPA over 4.00. Moreover, graduate students in the "Scientific Preparation" programs and students who are still studying in the Department of Basic English are exempted from Erasmus applications.

Applicants are allowed to make 4 preferences among available options and they rank those in terms of their preferences before they take the English proficiency exam. In other words, students choose among the inter-institutional agreements that are available to their departments. Each agreement has its own specific quota and criteria

⁵ Turkish National Agency decided to implement this rule after the people who lost their lives during the coup attempt on July 15, 2017 were officially announced as martyrs by the state.

in terms of study field, study cycle, language proficiency, academic standing and duration of the mobility. Moreover, students are allowed to apply to benefit from the program only for 1 semester as METU ICO prioritizes fair distribution of Erasmus grants among applicants. Only in some cases where the inter-institutional agreement dictates a mobility period for an academic year, participants get to spend the whole year at the host institution from the beginning of their mobility. However, extending Erasmus semester for one more term is possible at the end of the mobility, but it is subjected to the approval of both home and host institutions.

Once the results are announced, each student is assigned a METU ICO mobility specialist as an administrative advisor, who is responsible for helping the students throughout their mobility. The advisors at ICO initiate students' mobility by officially nominating them to ICO's counterparts at the host institutions. This is where the actual interaction with the destination university starts for students. After receiving the nomination, the host university officials respond with the required documents for the application that usually asks for student transcripts, student certificate, valid passport and selection of courses at the host university. The receiving institution sets a deadline for application and sends students their acceptance packages once students submit the required documents successfully. Obtaining the letter of acceptance is a crucial step for students as they use it for their visa applications. Students are usually asked to bring documents such as health insurance covering their mobility, their social security status, parents' bank statements, letter of acceptance from the host institution, and their criminal record. Figure 1 below captures the full cycle of a students' Erasmus mobility;

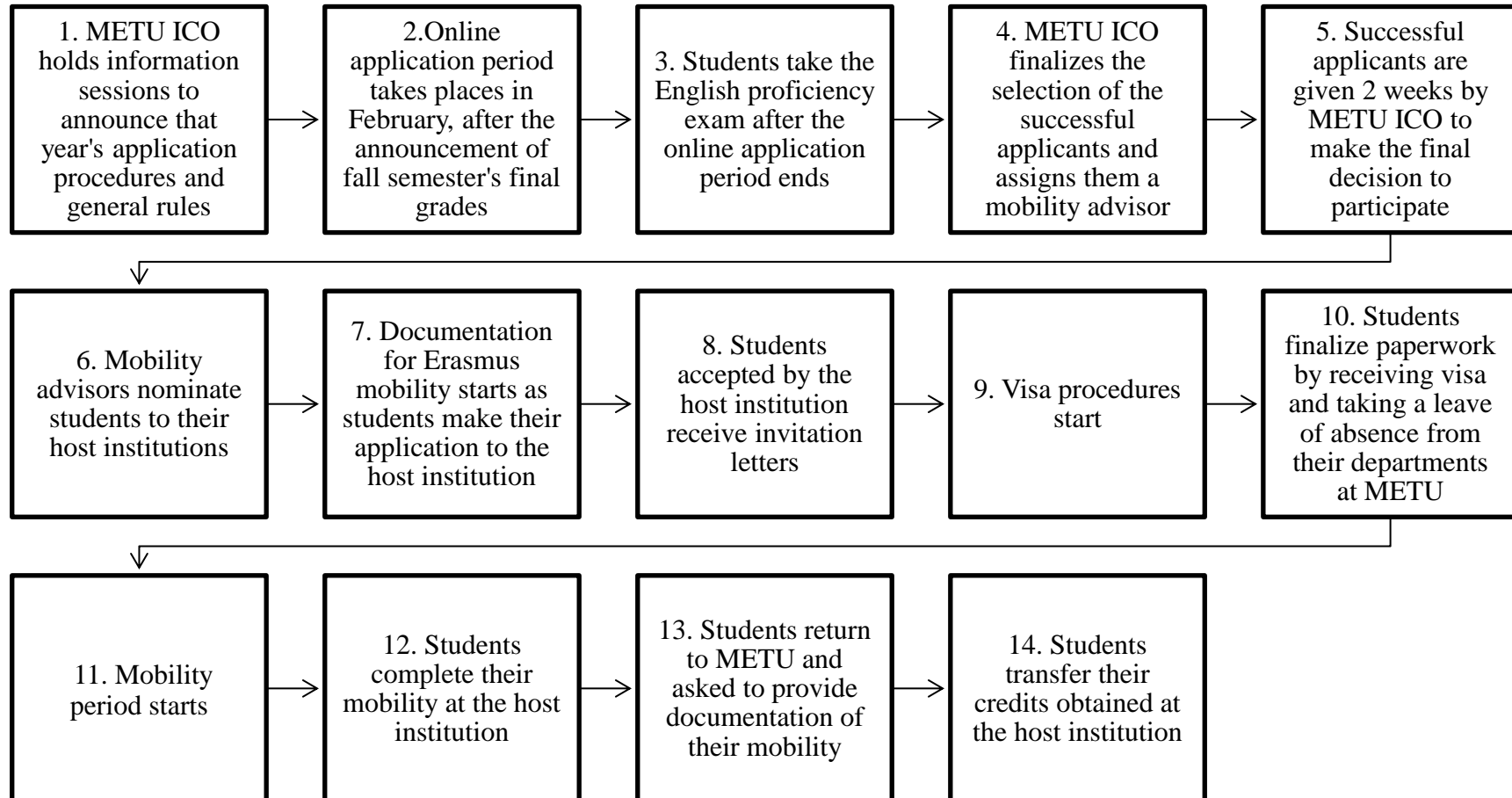


Figure 1 The Full Cycle of a Student's Erasmus Mobility

2.4 Exchange Programs at METU

There are currently 4 exchange mobility frameworks that METU has to offer to its students who consider spending a study period abroad. These programs are namely, Overseas Exchange Program, Mevlana Exchange Program, Erasmus+ for program countries (Key Action 103) and Erasmus+ for partner countries (Key Action 107). While the focus of this study will be on Erasmus+ for program countries covering intra-European mobility as the most popular and in-demand one, it is still important to provide a full picture in order to emphasize why Erasmus Program stands out among other student exchange frameworks in terms of the number of applicants and participants each year, available inter-institutional agreements showing the depth of ties, and the institutional orientation for the program.

2.4.1 Overseas Exchange Program

The first mobility framework that is available to METU students is Overseas Exchange Program. This framework mainly includes higher education institutions from countries, such as U.S.A, Canada, Australia, Israel, Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Taiwan⁶. The repertoire for Overseas Exchange partners at METU is a good representation of the institution's tradition and academic orientation as the distribution of partners and agreements mainly illustrate the American university model that METU originally was founded on in 1956.

Overseas Exchange frameworks are embedded in the official collaboration agreements that METU has with universities in these countries mentioned above. As of June 2017, METU has 115 Overseas Exchange agreements. These exchange schemes involve no grants and students are usually only exempted from paying tuition fees at hosting universities.

⁶ The full list of METU's Overseas Exchange partners can be found here; <http://ico.metu.edu.tr/overseas-exchange-partners> (Date accessed: 12.06.2017)

Considering the cost of life in these destinations and the absence of funding, it is fair to argue that only the economically privileged students can benefit from the Overseas Exchange Program. Moreover, the nature of the Overseas Exchange Program agreements seeks out a balance in terms of incoming and outgoing student numbers. This balance is usually applied by the partner universities in the developed countries to prevent the exploitation of one-way mobility to their institutions. That is to say, the partner university expects a somewhat balanced level of participation from both parties. However, considering the student flows from each side in this case, it is fair to argue that this method usually works against the favor of METU students as it limits their mobility prospects after several participants from METU to partners in the developed countries. Due to several factors such as university reputation, domestic political context and general attraction of the country, METU hosts a considerably lower number of students from its partner institutions in the developed countries. Thus, Overseas Exchange is not a very common student mobility framework at METU. There are usually around 80-100 applications each year for Overseas Exchange Program and around 30-40 students are placed to partner universities as the result of their applications.

However, it is possible to observe high dropout patterns from the students who initially applied to participate in this program. The students usually realize the costs of travel and living after their applications or sometimes they simply have troubles with the visa regimes of their destination countries as they participate in this program without any sponsor and grant support. As a result, very few students eventually benefit from the Overseas Exchange Program scheme each year.

2.4.2 Mevlana Exchange Program

Mevlana Exchange Program provides another alternative for METU students who want to spend one or two semesters abroad. The program inherits its name from Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi, 13th-century poet and Sufi mystic, who emphasized

tolerance and love during his time. He visited numerous educational centers throughout his lifespan both as a scholar and as a student (YÖK, 2014). Mevlana Program was legislatively implemented in 2011 and it is governed by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK). The program includes higher education institutions from all over the world, except European countries benefitting from Erasmus Program (YÖK, 2014). METU started to take part in Mevlana Exchange Program in the 2013-2014 academic year. Mevlana Program has been developed as a response to Erasmus Program by the Council of Higher Education with a strong policy-making agenda⁷, especially in terms of utilizing the framework regionally, among the neighboring countries to Turkey.

There are only 45 Mevlana Exchange agreements available at METU and a vast majority of these agreements overlap with METU's Overseas Exchange partners with the exception of some HEIs from neighboring countries such as Azerbaijan or Middle Eastern and Central Asian countries like Jordan and Kazakhstan⁸. Although there is financial support from YÖK for the participants, the grants are paid in Turkish Lira⁹ and the funding is scarce. According to latest figures (YÖK, 2017), outgoing students to Europe, Asia-Pacific, Latin America and North America regions receive monthly €298,5, students who opt for HEIs Sub-Saharan Africa and Central Asia receive monthly €273,6 and students who will be going to South Caucasus, Southern Asia, Middle East and North Africa regions are awarded monthly €248,7. The final selection of the grantees is made by YÖK and very few students are usually able to receive financial support.

⁷ President Erdoğan, in a meeting with university representatives from the Islamic world, asked YÖK to transform Mevlana Program “into something like the Erasmus Program” on 26 July, 2017 (Diken, 2017).

⁸ The full list of METU's Mevlana Exchange Program partners can be found here; <http://ico.metu.edu.tr/mevlana-partners> (Date accessed: 12.06.2017)

⁹ All monetary amounts in Turkish Lira had been converted to EURO currency in this study. The conversion was made in line with the exchange rate as of June 30, 2017.

In addition to limited funding, Mevlana Exchange Program also involves a complex bureaucracy when compared to other exchange programs available at students' disposal. The program has complicated limitations in terms of participants' destinations and departments at the host institution. To illustrate, only students who are enrolled in Natural Sciences, Engineering and Health Sciences fields are allowed to visit countries such as U.S.A, Australia and Canada while students in Social Sciences departments can benefit from the program in countries such as Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan (YÖK, 2017). Therefore, similar to Overseas Exchange mobility scheme, the demand for Mevlana Program is particularly low among METU students and usually the students with distinct host country preferences are benefitting from it. Consequently, the number of Mevlana Exchange Program beneficiaries is very low at METU as a maximum 15-20 students actually participate in the program each year. The dropout rates are similar to Overseas Exchange and this is even complemented by the last minute legislative changes made by Turkish Higher Education Council Mevlana Program Directorate.

2.4.3 Erasmus Program at METU

METU has been a part of the Erasmus Program in Turkey since its pilot year in Turkey in 2003. The program quickly established itself as the main form of student exchange scheme at METU and in Turkey in general due to available financial support and effective structure in terms of its organization. That is to say, the concept of student exchange mobility almost became associated with Erasmus in Turkey as the program also became visible by the incoming students of European origin.

Within the framework Erasmus Program, students can spend a semester at one of the program countries in Europe. The term “program countries” is used by the European Commission to refer to the 28 member states of the European Union and 5 additional non-EU countries, namely, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Turkey. According to Erasmus+ Program Guide (European Commission, 2017), students receive funding as support for travel and

living costs during their studies abroad. The amount of the financial support is determined by the National Agencies in the respective countries based on living costs in the destination countries. Within this perspective, the countries participating in Erasmus+ Program are divided into three categories in terms lower, medium and higher range of grants that the students will receive. European Commission sets the criteria and provides ranges for these grants as 150 to 400 EUR per month for lower range EU grant, 200 to 450 EUR per month for medium range and 250 to 500 EUR for higher range EU grant. In line with the criteria set by the European Commission, the Turkish National Agency, the governing body in Turkey for Erasmus+ Program, designated the grant amounts for beneficiaries from Turkey in their Handbook for Key Action 1 Learning Mobility of Individuals in Program Countries (2016) as follows;

Table 3 Monthly Erasmus Grant Amounts for Participants from Turkey

Country Group	Countries	Monthly Grant Amount
1. Group Program Countries	Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom	500€
2. Group Program Countries	Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Luxemburg, The Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain	400€
3. Group Program Countries	Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Macedonia	300€

METU utilized Erasmus scheme with administrative support as well as the faculty staff's orientation for international exchanges. As of June 2017, METU possesses 321 inter-institutional Erasmus agreements¹⁰ with 29 of the 32 available program countries. That is to say, except for Liechtenstein, Norway and Iceland, there are available destinations for METU students all over Europe to spend a semester within the framework of Erasmus program. Therefore, the demand for Erasmus mobility from the students has been evident throughout the years. Figure 2 below shows the number of outgoing Erasmus Program applications at METU in each academic year for the last 10 years at METU from 2008 to 2017;

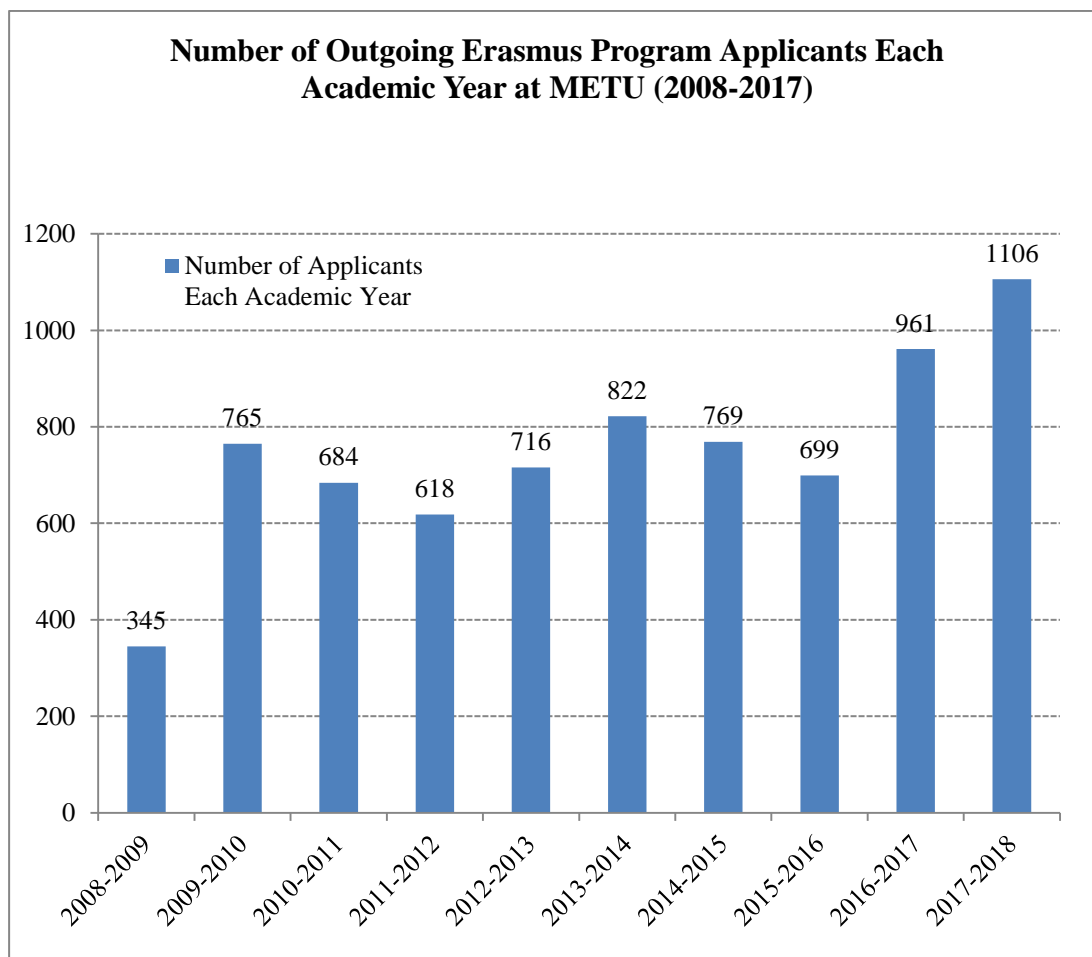
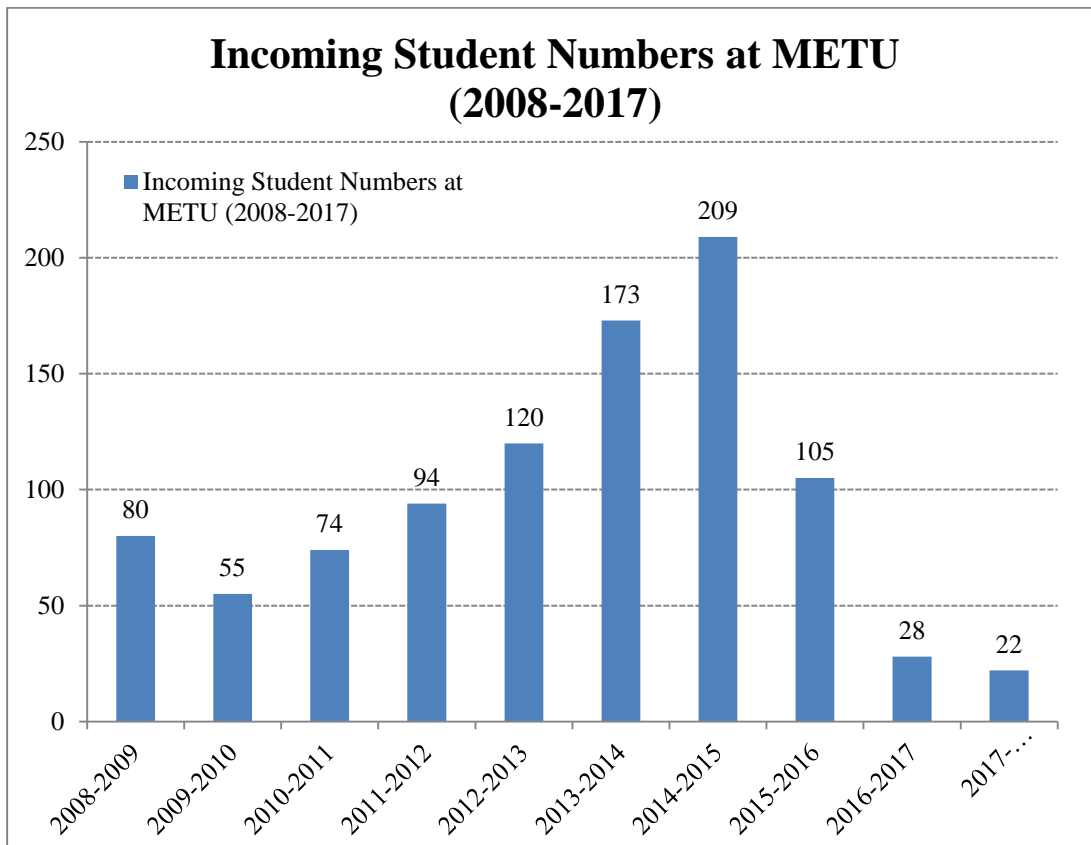


Figure 2 Number of Outgoing Erasmus Program Applications at METU (2008-2017)

¹⁰ The full list of METU's Erasmus partners can be found here;
<http://ico.metu.edu.tr/Erasmus-partners> (Date accessed: 12.06.2017)

From this perspective, it is fair to argue that Erasmus Program stands out as the most popular and efficient opportunity for METU students who wish to spend a semester abroad. Furthermore, it is possible to argue that participating in an international exchange scheme connotes with participating in the Erasmus Program.

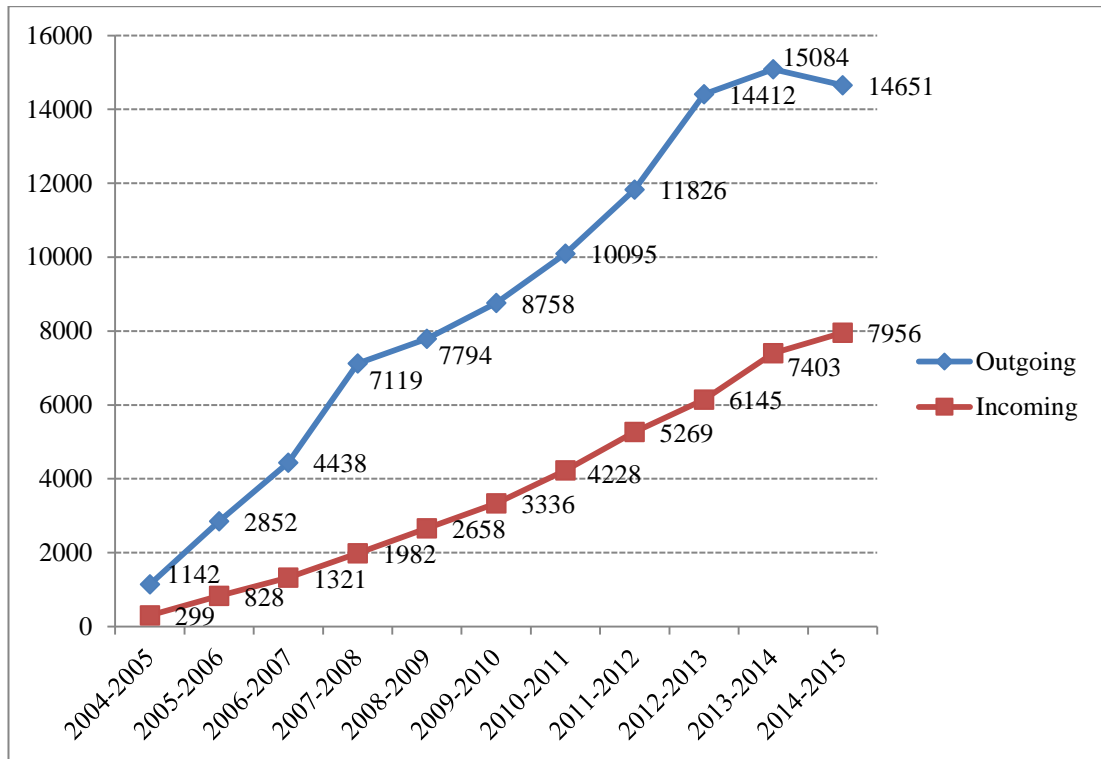
On the other hand, Erasmus Program at METU is also renowned for the institution's capacity to host students from program countries in Europe. Due to its campus, academic prestige and the language of instruction, METU has been able to host a significant number of students within the framework of Erasmus Program in the recent years. This feature also cemented the program's status among METU students as the most popular and visible international student exchange scheme available at the institution. However, the incoming student numbers from European higher education institutions decreased dramatically after the second half of 2015-2016 academic year due to rising political instability and terror attacks in the country. While the official data has not been made available by Turkish National Agency yet, based on my professional experience, it is fair to argue that the drastic decrease in incoming student numbers from European institutions is not specific to METU as it emerged as a general trend which affected other higher institutions in Turkey as well. Below, Figure 3 shows the incoming student numbers at METU within the framework of Erasmus Program in the last 10 years (2008-2017);



* Student number for 2017-2018 academic year only covers the students who will be visiting METU during the fall semester and it is subjected to change.

Figure 3 Number of Incoming Erasmus Student Numbers at METU (2008-2017)

As mentioned above, the political instability and the frequent terror attacks Turkey suffered significantly affected the incoming student flows to the country. Many European partners informed METU that they unilaterally stopped student mobility from their institutions on their behalf due to security concerns. At moment, most of the incoming Erasmus Program students at METU are coming from countries such as Germany and the Netherlands, from the families with migration backgrounds originating from Turkey. While the participation patterns of these students are worth mentioning and could be a topic for another research, this study does not focus on this particular form of mobility. Figure 4 below illustrates the overall incoming and outgoing student mobility instances that took place within the framework of the Erasmus Program in Turkey, from the first implementation of the program to the 2014-2015 academic year (2004 – 2014);



Source: Turkish National Agency, Turkish Higher Education Institutions Booklet (2016)

Figure 4 Overall Erasmus Student Mobility Numbers in Turkey (Annual Numbers between 2004-2014)

At this point it important to mention that there are 2 exchange programs available at METU under the Erasmus framework. The first one, as mentioned above, is Erasmus+ Key Action 103 that covers program countries. This program is the main scheme for outgoing student mobility at METU. The second program, Erasmus+ Key Action 107 International Credit Mobility, is a new program established by the European Commission to extend the implementation of Erasmus+ Program from European borders to 84 partner countries all over the world. According to European Commission (2017), “partner countries are countries which participate in certain Actions of the Program, subject to specific criteria or conditions”.

In International Credit Mobility Program, the world is divided into 13 regions by the European Commission in terms of location of the partner countries. The main logic

behind this program is to mobilize students from these regions to the 33 program countries. That is why, in line with the program's official structure, International Credit Mobility Program has been established at METU to receive students from partner countries rather than sending METU students to these destinations. Outgoing student mobility is embedded in the program but the number of vacancies is low. Therefore, the program does not manifest itself a considerable option for outgoing students due to limitations in outgoing student vacancies. Moreover, International Credit Mobility Program is the most recent student mobility framework at METU as it became available in 2015 and it is possible to argue that it is still in the establishment phase. That is why; the focus of this study will solely be on the Erasmus+ program which covers the 33 program countries.

In the next chapter, the research problem of this study will be provided. The explanation of the research problem will be followed by the presentation of the research design and methodology that was used in this research. Finally, the terminological differentiation will be made and the key concepts will be explained while the international student mobility phenomenon will be drawn.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 The Research Problem and the Research Question

The aim of this study is to reflect on the motivations and expectations of higher education students in Turkey to participate in Erasmus Program in the case of METU. The research had been shaped around several questions in order to understand these motivations and expectations from students' perspective. The first goal in this framework is to find out who participates or attempts to participate, in Erasmus Program at METU. This can only be covered by finding the demographic, socio-economic and departmental profiles of the students who apply to benefit from the program. That is why exploring the effects of determinants such as gender, parental occupation and education, family income, students' residency prior to higher education, departmental background and study years, and previous mobility experience on Erasmus Program application will be an important aspect of this research in order to profile the Erasmus Program participants at METU.

The second important challenge at this point is to focus on the motivations and expectations of these students in order to make sense of their drives to participate in this program. As mentioned before, there is a strong demand from the students to participate in Erasmus Program. Thus, grasping the main components of this drive is crucial for any scholarly work regarding this subject. To be able to provide such analysis, it is important to include the pre-mobility aspirations of the participants and their long term plans for the future to this research. Students' expectations from participating in the program and their perception and projection of the forthcoming Erasmus experience are the main themes to be focused on at this point. Students' attempts in this context could be part of a long-term life course planning in order to

move abroad or they could also be expecting personal gains in terms of experiencing new cultures, improving their language skills, enhancing their career prospects or simply getting away from their routines in their local environment.

Thirdly, reflecting on students' conceptualization of their mobility prospects by focusing on the social and the individual interpretation of this mobility is another important concern for this study. This conceptualization involves the context in the local environment and the perceived image of the destination country for the students. Moreover, many of the students are going abroad for the first time with the Erasmus Program and this is an important feature regarding students' perspectives as it leaves a big room for imagination rather than actual experience. On the other hand, this is also the stage that the families come into the picture. Sending their children to a Western country, especially to Europe could be a source of sensation and pride for some parents. Therefore, it is possible that interpretation of Erasmus participation could be loaded with different meanings on different levels, both for the participants themselves and their families.

Finally, relocating students' narrative in the recent social and political context in Turkey is another important focus of this study. The country has been going through a significant political and social transformation in recent years. That is why integrating the response of young individuals to the social and political turmoil in the country and finding a possible correlation between the increasing demand for Erasmus participation and discontent with domestic politics will add value and depth to this study. As discussed previously, METU's imagery as in the political scene of the country and the political attitude of the students are considered as leftist, liberal and secular under an increasingly authoritarian and conservative regime in Turkey. Therefore, from a wider perspective, focusing on the possible correlation between domestic political context and the increasing demand for Erasmus participation would be significant in sociological terms and it would expand the scope of this study to discuss Erasmus Program participation as a way to break away from Turkey for the politically discontent students.

To sum up, this study focuses on the pre-mobility phase of Erasmus Program participation of students in the case of METU. Within this framework, the aim of the research is to answer the following questions;

- 1) Who participates (or attempts to participate) in Erasmus Program at METU in terms of demographic, socio-economic and departmental profiles of the applicants?
- 2) What are the motivations and expectations of the students who attempt to participate in Erasmus Program?
- 3) How do students conceptualize their forthcoming Erasmus mobility? What is the social and personal interpretation of this experience?
- 4) Does the recent domestic political context in Turkey have any considerable influence on the students' decision to participate in Erasmus Program?

3.2 Research Method

In this study, both descriptive and exploratory research was conducted to provide a comprehensive analysis of the pre-mobility determinants of Erasmus Program participation in the case of METU students. That is to say, a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods was employed in this thesis.

Quantitative research techniques had been used to define the socio-economic, demographic and departmental characteristic of the applicant cohort of 2017 application period at METU. On the other hand, qualitative research tools had been employed to reflect on the personal interpretation and the detailed analysis of the Erasmus Program participants' conceptualization of their experience by using in-depth interviews. Thus, quantitative research was utilized to make macro-level analyses in profiling and defining the sample of the study while qualitative research

was used at the micro-level to highlight the experiences and meanings attributed to Erasmus phenomenon by the individuals. As Marvasti (2004) argues;

On the most basic level, quantitative research involves the use of methodological techniques that represent the human experience in numerical categories, sometimes referred to as statistics. Conversely, qualitative research provides detailed description and analysis of the quality, or the substance, of the human experience. However, there is much overlap between the two, both in practice and theory. Thus, these methodological approaches should not be viewed as diametrical opposites. (p. 7)

Moreover, as cited in Marvasti (2004, p. 8), Silverman (1985) evaluates qualitative and quantitative research and claims that the use of these approaches "...is not a choice between polar opposites that faces us, but a decision about balance and intellectual breadth and rigour, where used intelligently and appropriately, there is no reason why quantification has to be totally shunned" (Silverman, 1985; 17). That is why integrating these different research methods would add value and depth to our study.

From this perspective, the fieldwork in this study comprised of two parts; the primary online survey that had been conducted to the entire Erasmus Program applicant cohort of 2017 application period at METU and the follow-up in-depth interviews with the students whose applications had been successful.

The survey was used for defining the key characteristics of the Erasmus Program applicants at METU such as socio-economic, demographic and departmental profiles. Socio-economic determinants employed in this survey was implemented in line with the conceptualization that was made by Kalaycıoğlu et al. (2010) in their study of Ankara city center in terms of socio-economic status. Moreover, further questions regarding the expectations from Erasmus participation, career prospects, future plans and personal aspirations of the students in terms of their future mobility experience were also included to the question set of the survey. The survey contained a total of 61 questions, ranging from multiple-choice to open-ended answers in addition to Likert scales (see Appendix A for survey questions). The survey had been

specifically designed to create a basis for this study's framework since it enabled us to draw on analyses from a highly representative data. The Erasmus Program application period took place on February 6– 26, 2017, and applicants received periodical reminders via e-mails for a month after the application period closed. As a result, among 1107 students who applied to participate in the program, 415 students participated in the survey, thus making the response rate 37.5%.

At the end of the application period, the selection of successful applicants was made by ICO and 529 students had been given the chance to participate in the Erasmus Program. Successful students made their semester preferences between fall and spring semesters to participate in the program. While 257 students chose to participate in the fall semester, 272 students opted for the spring semester to spend their exchange mobility period. A practical decision was made at this point by intentionally limiting the sample for in-depth interviews with the fall semester participants as these students had already started to their pre-mobility procedures at that time on the contrary to spring semester participants who have not started any preparation for their mobility. Thus, 19 students were interviewed with semi-structured, in-depth interviews based on the key characteristics in regard to gender, department and study level. 12 of the interviewees volunteered to participate in this study once a general invitation sent to them by e-mails. The rest of the participants were found by using snowball sampling.

The fieldwork for this study started in February 2017 with implementation of the online survey and ended in June 2017 with the completion of interviews. Prior to conducting the survey and interview, a pilot study had been conducted with the help of 25 students who previously participated in the Erasmus Program. All interviews throughout the study had been semi-structured in-depth interviews and they were conducted at METU. The interviews lasted 20 to 45 minutes and they were recorded with a recording device with the permission of the interviewees. The tape recordings of the interviews were also supported by the notes that were taken by the researcher during the meetings with the informants.

3.3 Understanding International Student Mobility and Erasmus Program Participation

As manifested in the previous discussions which will also be supported with the empirical findings in the next chapters, there is a significant demand from METU students to take a study period abroad by utilizing the student exchange schemes available to them. Students put a lot of effort and energy to grasp this opportunity and participate in Erasmus Program. It is possible to argue that the program has a highly desired status among students and it is strongly embedded in the peer culture of the students.

On the other hand, it can also be discussed that going abroad with student exchange schemes is not the result of a one-time decision, but includes a trajectory of different events and decisions that are the outcome of a wider process as Carlson (2011) argues. That is why a sociological analysis and framework is required to reflect on the motivations and expectations of higher education students in Turkey to participate in the Erasmus Program in the case METU. Thus, this study aims to capture students' Erasmus Program participation at METU in regard to the concepts such as mobility, biography, socio-economic status, future migration plans, push-pull factors regarding the home country and host institution, career prospects and social, cultural and mobility capital of the students, in addition to the domestic political context in Turkey as explained previously.

3.3.1 International Student Mobility; the Terminological Differentiation and Definition of the Key Concepts

At this point, it is important to categorize the term international student mobility as it can be considered as an umbrella term that covers different types and schemes of mobility practices for studying abroad including the particular focus of this research; Erasmus Program. King et al. (2010) start with making the terminological differentiation between mobility and migration by favoring the term mobility. They

argue that although there is a blurred line between the terms of mobility and migration, it is more convenient to use the term mobility as “it can be regarded as a generic concept which subsumes migration” (2010, p. 7). This can be considered as a solid categorization as these terms, or acts in a sense, are intertwined and student mobility can be an initiation to future migratory behavior in many cases which will also be elaborated in the empirical findings of this study. Moreover, King and Raghuram (2013) also argue that mobility is the more flexible and appropriate term which also includes uncertainties that cover the majority of migration projects. They note;

Mobility highlights the movement involved in migration, rather than privileging the sending and receiving localities and their perspectives. In much of the literature, it also implies a shorter time-frame for the movement, and a high probability of return, as in the Erasmus or Junior Year Abroad type of scheme (King and Raghuram, 2013; p. 129).

Thus, this study will also favor the term mobility when referring to the Erasmus Program as the Erasmus framework covers a shorter time period with a planned time-span and returning destination.

On the other hand, another categorization in regard to duration of the mobility is required to differentiate different types of international student mobility. Ballatore and Frede (2013) make this distinction as spontaneous mobility and institutionalized mobility. Spontaneous mobility covers international degree-seeking students who spend the full duration of their education abroad to obtain diplomas. This form of student mobility is most evident in the student flows from the developing world to developed countries. The second type of mobility that remains as the focus of this study is institutionalized student mobility. This type of student mobility is also described as credit mobility. According to Ballatore and Frede (2013);

Institutionalised mobility can be described as ‘short term’ because it cannot exceed 12 months and should be fully integrated into the curriculum of the university of origin. Apart from joint-degree courses, students participating in institutionalised mobility only obtain a degree from their university of origin. It is expected that at the end of their stay, institutionally mobile scholars will return to their home country. Students who participate in the Erasmus programme fall into the category of institutionalised student mobility. (p. 526)

This terminological differentiation is important to provide a basis for the discussions on credit mobility scheme that this research is built on. There is a vast literature on various forms of student mobility, as it becomes a big sector involving an enormous network of individuals and institutions from all over the world. Within this context, Erasmus Program is arguably the most prolific student exchange scheme in the world. Locating the program in this vast literature would allow us to engage in wider theoretical discussions that will be illustrated later in this section. The aim for the following sections is to draw the framework covering international student mobility phenomenon and support this framework with the existing literature on different dimensions of the international student mobility.

3.3.2 Mobility and Biography

It is possible to argue that any analysis concerning the international student mobility phenomenon requires a conceptualization of the term mobility from a sociological perspective. To illustrate, as manifested in the overall application patterns, there is a significant demand from METU students to be mobile via taking part in student exchange schemes, particularly in Erasmus Program. Participating in the program for an average student at METU requires a lot of time, effort and planning. Students take exams and rigorous selection procedures to be able to participate in the Erasmus Program. After succeeding in the initial application, successful participants start the paperwork phase and visa applications, which, from my experience as a “Mobility Specialist”, are some of the most challenging aspects of the process since most students find it really hard to make sense of the bureaucracy involved in that phase of the mobility. Students leave their comfort zones and embark on a journey to a relatively unknown place in an attempt to become mobile. Souto Otero (2008) argues

that the Erasmus experience is one of the main sources of attraction for students to participate in the program. Moreover, the available Erasmus funds also attract many students, as it can be considered as a big luxury for many. Ballatore and Ferede (2013) argue that the financial support in the Erasmus Program works as an important incentive as mobility is already a coveted action for the individuals. It is possible to argue that these incentives for participating in the Erasmus Program also overlap with the macro trends in the social and personal life of the individuals with the emphasis on the mobility phenomenon. To illustrate, According to Hannam, Sheller and Urry (2006), the concept of mobility has become one of the defining keywords for the 21st century which creates its own repercussions and contexts. They argue;

The concept of mobilities encompasses both the large-scale movements of people, objects, capital and information across the world, as well as the more local processes of daily transportation, movement through public space and the travel of material things within everyday life. (p. 1)

However, mobilities have specific contexts or “moorings” as they claim. It is not possible to describe the mobility of people, information or goods without focusing on the structural and institutional ingredients that make way for mobilities. Within the framework of this study, it is possible to argue that students’ drive to participate in exchange schemes is strongly influenced by their social settings, daily routines, feelings and their perception of the social life around them. Thus, the “moorings” in this case refer to a complex set of social and historical contexts as well as the limitations they feel that they have been subjected to in Turkey, both in social and political terms. To illustrate, going beyond the European borders is a significant challenge for many Turkish citizens, as it requires both economic resources and a considerable amount of labor to overcome the strict visa regimes that the European countries apply. It is possible to argue that the large majority of participating students would have been unable to participate in an international exchange experience without the Erasmus Program.

According to Papatsiba (2005; p. 1) “mobility is mostly associated with non-definitive relocations and with active forms of individual linkage with the home country. Thus, unlike migration, mobility does not appear as a form of ‘uprooting’, often accompanied by the feeling of loss of the home country, but like an experience of flexible connectedness”. On the other hand, as it will be discussed in more detail in the next chapters, most of the participants expressed their discontent with the domestic political environment in Turkey. Thus, the “flexible connectedness” as Papatsiba argues becomes a much more complex issue in the case of participants from Turkey. Furthermore, considering Turkey’s longstanding and complex history with the West, from the Ottoman modernization, when the Ottoman elites turned their faces to the Europe to progress from the “sick man of Europe”, to this day, it is possible to argue that going to Europe means more than simply traveling. It is a prestigious act that has been ascribed with a sense of accomplishment in this context, for higher education students especially in the case of METU. According to Sunata (2011);

Brain migration from Turkey dates back to the decline of the Ottoman Empire, ‘the Sick Man of Europe’, under the influences of the central powers of Europe. This history draws an analogy of modernization, also referred to as westernization. Since the early 19th century, the Empire attached importance to raising a Westernist Ottoman intelligentsia and ruling class to eliminate its backwardness. (p. 147)

Thus in METU’s case, in line with the political context presented previously, it is possible to argue that the drive for mobility of students to Europe is also enhanced by the meaning historically attributed to the West and Westernization. For Erasmus Program participants in this study, a dichotomy could be drawn with the increasingly authoritarian and conservative domestic political setting and the prospects of going to a “modern, democratic and developed” European country. As Urry (2002) describes, traveling leads to experiences of physical proximity to specific places, persons and events in ways that this association is deemed as a must and desired.

On the other hand, it can also be argued that there is an element of personal aspirations in regard to participating in Erasmus Program. Participation can be

considered as an achievement in the sense of enriching their biographies as individuals. Thus, it is possible to argue that the Erasmus participation has also a strong individualized aspect for many students. Desforges (2000) who particularly focuses on traveling argues that young people embark on journeys when they question their self-identity and they move towards a better self that is projected in the future. Moreover, according to Papatsiba (2005; p. 32);

Mobility represents a new form of expression, emergence and development of the self, a symbolic expression of individualisation. It is thus perceived as reflecting contemporary representations of individuality, which appeal for achievement, life choices and freedom. In other words, it ascribes with the myth of individualization.

Therefore, it is possible to argue that participating in Erasmus Program can be considered as a form of self-expression and opportunity for students to distinguish themselves from their peers. It is a significant milestone in one's life trajectory, signaling the capability and achievement as well managing one's own life. As Findlay et al. (2005) argue, the motivation to go abroad in Erasmus mobility is influenced by the experiential goals rather than being influenced by traditional economic migration concerns such as looking for a better job or higher income.

On the other hand, according to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002), contemporary individuals have the opportunity to act in an open structure in terms of available options and motivations that were absent in the past. Therefore, this social space frees people from traditional commitments and limitations. Individuals now may shift and transform their identities within different settings. From this perspective, it is possible to argue that participating in Erasmus Program for students could be the first move towards the construction of an identity that is reinforced by the exposure to new experiences as Ballatore and Ferede (2013) argue. In other words, as Papatsiba (2005; p. 32) states, "the contemporary individual is pushed to embrace the objective to continuously promote oneself, and to be entirely in charge of inventing one's own trajectory and life, and relationships with others. To be mobile thus becomes evidence of this capacity of active orientation, control taking and

guiding one's life-path". This approach coincides with Giddens (1991) who argues that the conditions of late modernity force people to shape their own biographical projects. According to Brannen and Nilsen (2005);

The individualization thesis claims that, where classic modernity was characterised by class-based societies that shaped people's lives as 'destiny', in reflexive modernity and the risk society individuals are left to shape their own destinies. Social class no longer has the same structuring role that it once had. Where once there was a standard biography there is now a choice biography for people to create for themselves. (p. 141)

Moreover, students' educational backgrounds and qualifications also play an important role in terms of their orientation towards Erasmus participation. As in the case of METU, students go through a highly competitive university entrance process with exams and rankings starting from their high school years. Even to participate in Erasmus, they compete with their peers in terms of their academic success and English proficiency. In addition to this competitive aspect, METU students are exposed to a western education, starting with English as the language of instruction. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) note that the education system which includes new ways of thinking and universalistic values as well as foreign languages transforms the traditional individuals with self-reflection and puts an emphasis on individual performance. Therefore, individual aspirations become an important aspect of students' decision-making processes in terms of their attempts to construct their biographies. Woodman (2009) describes the choice biographies as follows;

The concept of choice biography, mostly referenced to the work of Ulrich Beck, marks a distinction between normal and choice biographies. Normal biographies refer to the relatively predictable and linear move from youth to adulthood, marked by engagement in paid work, education and household formation, seen to have characterized most of the trajectories of those born in the Western world's post-World War II baby boom. Choice biographies, in contrast, are seen to emerge in the contemporary Western world as more of the biography becomes open to 'choice' and in need of being constructed personally. (p. 243)

As illustrated above, the international student mobility literature puts much emphasis on the individualistic tendencies. While it is hard to deny the individual aspect of the international student mobility, individual aspirations illustrate only a limited part of

this particular phenomenon. As Brooks and Waters (2010) argue, the decision to go abroad for students is also embedded strongly in the social relationships that are influenced by parents, friends, university education, or even romantic partners. Especially in Turkey where the family plays an important role in terms of providing social and financial support to individuals as Lüküslü (2016) puts out, it is possible to argue that the decision to participate in Erasmus Program goes beyond simply being an individual decision for participants from Turkey. Instead, it is influenced by a set of further factors such as family, social settings, structural factors, socio-economic status and demographic characteristics.

3.3.3 Socio-economic Status; Being Able to Afford a Semester Abroad

As mentioned above, focusing on the concepts of mobility and personal biographies is not sufficient to understand the participation in Erasmus Program. As Papatsiba (2005; p. 30) argues, “One has to bear in mind that the ‘rosy’ facet of mobility does not stand alone. Mobility also reflects existing socio-economic forces and constraints, and follows current socio-cultural models of behavior”. As the empirical data will show later in this study, going abroad for a semester is something financially challenging for some students. Even with the available Erasmus funds, it is very likely that there will be a need for extra economic resources to cover the costs of living. Especially in the case of Turkey where the domestic currency Lira¹¹ gets weaker day by day against Euro and many other foreign currencies, the decision to spend a semester abroad is an ambitious investment for many students and their families. Therefore, it is possible to argue that socio-economic background of students is a key issue when analyzing the participation in Erasmus Program. That is why, investigating the socio-economic status of Erasmus Program participants at METU has been one of the primary goals for this study. The survey that was conducted to the applicant cohort of 2017 application period had been specifically designed to capture the main socio-economic characteristics of the students and their families, and these characteristics will be shown in the 4th chapter of the study.

¹¹ To illustrate, as of 30.06.2017, 1 EUR equals to 4,0198 TL when converted.

Although it is an undeniable aspect of international student mobility, Souto-Otero (2008) argues that the research on socio-economic aspect of the Erasmus participation is scarce (see Messer and Wolter 2005, Souto Otero and McCoshan 2006 and Eurostudent 2009 for some studies that focus on the socio-economic aspect of Erasmus participation). While the costs of seeking full-degree abroad are considerably higher, being able to afford a semester abroad is still an obstacle for many students. Therefore, as Carlson (2011) argues, the mobile students are likely to be from higher social-class backgrounds than non-mobile students as being mobile is also influenced by their previous education mobility or exposure to foreign countries. For Turkey, on the other hand, the socio-economic status of Erasmus participants is still relatively unknown with no or very little research about it. However, Souto-Otero (2008), who compares the European countries in terms of their national incomes, argues, that in richer European countries it is the students who are from families that are at the highest income levels participate in the program more often while the students from poorer countries tend to come from the lower socio-economic backgrounds. He notes that it is possible to distinguish the motivations of students to participate in the Erasmus Program based on their socio-economic status;

The participation patterns based on socio-economic status may highlight two different motivations for mobility: the predominance of mobility for 'consumption' from higher socio-economic groups in higher income countries versus mobility for 'investment' from less well-off people from lower income countries, the other countries falling somewhere in between these two extremes. (p. 137)

That is to say, the participation in the program may work as an affirmation of privileged status for students from higher income backgrounds while it could signal social mobility for students from lower income backgrounds. It is possible to argue that, for students from higher income backgrounds mobility is something accessible and coveted. However, for students from lower income backgrounds, Erasmus Program participation and international mobility could be considered as a limited opportunity which requires strategic decision-making and acquisition various forms of capitals. This analysis made by Souto-Otero is noteworthy and it signals the

importance of Bourdieusian forms of capital that one possesses and utilizes for participating in the Erasmus Program.

3.3.4 Mobilizing Various Forms of Capital for International Mobility

Bourdieu (1986) challenges the concept of capital beyond economic understanding of the term and puts the emphasis on immaterial aspects of cultural, social and symbolic capitals. He argues that there are different types of capital that are shaping one's social life in terms of family life, education, acquisition of intellectual sources and investing in means that are deemed valuable for one's social status. International student mobility at this point becomes an important feature where different forms of capital and social aspirations come together.

According to Carlson (2013), who draws on Bourdieu's (1986) forms of capital, mobility becomes a part of students' habitus. The term habitus encompasses the interaction and relationship between individuals and their social settings. In this case, mobility becomes an experience which turns into an habit while shaping one's identity. Moreover, as Waters (2007) argues, habitus can also include a shared experience with different social groups promoting new modes of behavior and expressions. However, what is more important here is to consider mobility as an end-product and focus on the pre-mobility phase for the students in order to understand the mobilization of capital resources. Bourdieu (1986) argues that middle classes tend to build cultural capital by using education as an opportunity. International education in this sense becomes a bigger attraction to obtain cultural capital. However, according to Findlay et al. (2011), the cultural capital framework in student migration is different from the classical human capital understanding in terms of the significance of qualities that are obtained in somewhere else rather than the domestic context and they note; "significance of cultural capital varies spatially and over time" (p. 121). Thus, it is possible to consider international student mobility as a source of cultural capital where individuals may utilize what they acquire from their

mobility experience later in their life-course in terms of future prospects concerning career or migration aspirations and decisions.

Moreover, Findlay et al. (2011) also considers international study as a part of symbolic capital which could be used as an “identity marker” that is used by students to distinguish themselves. (p. 128). Munk (2009) on the other hand, puts the emphasis on academic capital and informational capital. He defines informational capital as the academic capital including skills and recognized symbolic capital. According to Munk, the increasing numbers in university enrollment go hand in hand with increased competition in higher education. That is why having academic capital is considered as an important strategy to reproduce privileges of individuals and families in the social space. He argues that the informational capital derives from the concept of cultural capital which refers to the institutionalized forms of capital as Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) puts it.

Another important contribution to international student mobility literature comes from Elizabeth Murphy-Lejeune (2002) who introduces the term mobility capital in her anthropological study. Murphy-Lejeune (2002, p. 51) defines mobility capital as a “sub-component of human capital, enabling individuals to enhance their skills because of the richness of the international experience gained by living abroad”. She argues that the mobility capital is influenced by students’ families, personal histories, previous mobility experiences, foreign language proficiencies and personalities. She claims that students benefit a lot from these components during their mobility experiences. Within the scope of this study, Murphy-Lejeune’s understanding of mobility capital is important to point-out one of the significant characteristics of this research’s sample, in terms of students’ previous mobility experience. It is possible to argue that due to financial constraints and visa implications, a lack of international mobility experience can be expected from Erasmus Program participants. However, Brooks and Waters (2010) claim that although this approach is important to understand the significance of familial background and previous mobility experiences of students, it still ignores the social and interactive aspect of forms of

capital. Thus, they propose that mobility capital should be considered as a form of capital that can be converted to economic, social and cultural forms of capital in regard to international student mobility.

3.3.5 Migration or “Learning to Migrate”

As discussed previously, this study favors the term “international student mobility” over “international student migration” as an operational definition when analyzing the Erasmus Program. However, despite the very high probability of return and short span in Erasmus mobility scheme, this type of mobility is still a part of the migration phenomenon as Gonzalez et al. (2011) put out. Therefore, it is important to locate student mobility in the migration literature especially in terms of the framework of this research. As it will be backed by the empirical data, this study considers student mobility as an initiator of the possible future migratory behavior. As Findlay et al. (2011) argue, “the migration literature frequently creates false dichotomies between, for example, labour migration and other forms of mobility. This false binary is also found in the literature on student migration. Student mobility is often seen as discrete and disconnected from other mobilities (p. 127)”. Therefore, instead of focusing on dichotomies, considering international student mobility as a part of a life-course planning and future migration aspirations would be a better way of conceptualizing the term.

As this study covers the pre-mobility phase of Erasmus mobility, it is fair to argue that the focus is particularly on the migration aspirations of students rather than the real act of migration. Azmat et al. (2013, p. 99) argue that “aspirations relate to mental processes, and how these processes affect an idea, wish and preoccupation of individuals. These aspirations can be expressed in behavioural and conscious psychological ways”. That is why, the desire and act to participate in the program from students is significant for this study and it is important to reflect on the migratory aspirations of participants, as much of the literature on this subject (see Bracht et al., 2006; Findlay, King, Stam and Ruiz-Gelices, 2006; Parey and

Waldinger, 2008; Teichler and Janson, 2007) argue that there is a strong connection between studying abroad and future migratory behavior. That is to say, although migration aspirations do not mean subsequent migratory behavior, it is still important to consider these intentions into account as a marker for migration behavior as Van Mol (2016) argues. Moreover, according to Papatsiba (2005, p. 30), “all forms of deliberate movement of persons, the hope for a better present or future elsewhere drives the individual to experience migration or mobility”. That is why it is important to consider international student mobility not as a one-time event but as an array of complex motivations and aspirations that may shape individuals’ future. As Li et al. (1996) argue, there is a blurred line between “migrating to learn” and “learning to migrate”. Therefore, participating in Erasmus Program could be considered as an initiation which opens the doors to future migratory behavior for many students.

3.3.6 Push - Pull Factors

Push - pull factors are also one of the concepts that are used for explaining international student mobility. Although this model is mainly used in studies regarding international full-time degree-seeking students, it still could be a useful tool cover the study of credit mobility. According to Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), it is possible to highlight the global patterns of international student mobility based on push and pull factors that lead to students’ mobility. They argue that while push factors are related to students’ home country, pull factors represent the attractions in the destination country. Azmat et al. (2013, p. 100) list the push and pull factors as follows in Table 4;

Table 4 Push and Pull Factors (Azmat et al., 2013)

Push factors (the country of origin)	Pull factors (country of destination)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foreign degree better than local one • Students' inability to gain entry to local programs • Better understanding of the Western culture • Intention to migrate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reputation/profile of the country • Better knowledge/awareness of the country • Family decision/alumni network • Geographical proximity • Cost of higher education

While some of the determinants of this model such as being unable to gain entry to local programs or cost of higher education are not applicable to credit mobility schemes, it still gives a general picture regarding the determinants of international student mobility. However, it is important to keep in mind that this model puts the emphasis on mostly the external factors influencing international student mobility and largely ignores the individual and personal characteristics of the students as Daly (2011) argues. Therefore, making an analysis regarding the international student mobility by only focusing on push and pull factors would ignore a significant feature of the particular phenomenon by over-emphasizing external factors and ignoring the students' characteristics and individual aspirations as it was discussed before in this study. Still, the model can be expanded or altered in accordance with the domestic circumstances and it can be used to capture significant external factors. Within the scope of this study, it is possible to argue that the domestic political context in Turkey is one of the push factors for students to consider studying abroad, even though it is a short-term mobility with Erasmus Program.

3.3.7 Career Prospects

According to Teichler (2004), career prospects are one of the most important motivators for students to participate in Erasmus Program. He argues that this motivation is most evident for the students who are coming from the Eastern and Central European Union Member states that joined the EU with the enlargement policies. As discussed previously, participating in student exchange schemes is seen as an investment to obtain various forms of capital for some students. King et al. (2010) argue that international student mobility can be considered as a career apprenticeship for students as it has the potential to transform students to economically active migrants. According to Teichler (2007), students benefit from studying abroad as they obtain skills to face the challenges of the international dimensions of work life and they enhance their career prospects. Moreover, the experience of studying abroad also encourages students to take international vacancies. However, according to Bracht et al. (2006, p. 19),

Competences, transition to employment, career and professional assignment of former Erasmus students cannot be attributed predominantly to the temporary study experience in another European country. ... Erasmus has a mobilizing and reinforcing value, and often it has some value added as regards graduate career and notably international mobility and international work assignments, but certainly Erasmus has not such a strong impact on the careers of graduates as their more favourable careers and the stronger international components of their careers per se might suggest.

It is also important to note that evaluating the actual effect of Erasmus participation on future career prospects is a really hard task. Still, the promise of career prospects can be considered as a major incentive for many students to participate in the program. The research will provide its own insights and empirical findings in terms of students' career expectations from the Erasmus Program in the further sections.

In conclusion, this chapter covered the research problem, the research design and methodology that was employed in this study. Moreover, the terminological differentiation was made and the key concepts were explained while an overview of Erasmus Program participation determinants was provided within the scope of this chapter.

As discussed previously, Erasmus Program participation is a multi-faceted phenomenon which can be understood by engaging in wider theoretical discussions supported by the relevant empirical findings for specific cases. For this study, contextualizing this particular phenomenon in the case of METU students is as important as locating this research in the concerned literature. It is crucial to identify the key aspects of the Erasmus participation with wider discussions on mobility, biography, students' socio-economic backgrounds along with forms of social, cultural and mobility capital, participants' future migration plans, push-pull factors influencing the mobility of individuals and career prospects associated with Erasmus participation.

Thus, in the next chapter, the empirical findings of this study will be covered. The sample of the research will be defined and the key characteristics of the Erasmus applicants at METU in terms of their socio-economic, demographic and departmental profiles will be provided by analyzing the survey that had been conducted within the scope of this study. Furthermore, students' main expectations and motivations to participate in the Erasmus Program will be presented. The analysis of the survey will be followed by the interview data gathered from the in-depth interviews that will be used to highlight the experiences of applicants and meanings attributed to Erasmus phenomenon by the individuals.

CHAPTER 4

THE FIELD

4.1.1 The Sample Universe

The sample for this research consists of the applicant cohort of 2017 application period at METU consisting of 1107 students who have been the subject of the online survey as previously mentioned. While the online survey had been conducted to collect advanced sociological data, the basic input regarding the entire applicant cohort has been made available by ICO as the office collects specific data from the students for their applications. That is to say, in addition to the survey data collected from 415 applicants, this study also includes the overall characteristics of the total sample in terms of students' departments, age, gender and their destination preferences covering the 1107 students, who made Erasmus Program applications on February 6 - 26, 2017.

To illustrate, Table 5 shows the top 10 departments based on the number of applicants they supplied to the applicant cohort of 2017. Moreover, the number of enrolled undergraduate students (as of 2016-fall semester) in the 10 departments that are mentioned above based on the METU Registrar's Office Annual Activity Report (2016);

Table 5 Applicant Numbers Based on Top 10 Departments and Total Number of Enrolled Undergraduate Students at the Department

Department	No. of Applicants from the Dept.	Percentage Among All Applicants	No. of Undergraduate Students Enrolled in the Department as of Fall 2016
English Language Teaching	90	8.1%	474
Business Administration	84	7.5%	528
International Relations	76	6.8%	391
Political Sci. and Public Adm.	64	5.7%	485
Economics	62	5.6%	574
Architecture	54	4.8%	426
Sociology	54	4.8%	347
Psychology	52	4.7%	330
Electrical and Electronics Eng.	45	4%	1125
Mechanical Eng.	42	3.7%	1033

As shown above, students from Department of English Language Teaching present the largest numbers of applications although it is relatively a smaller department when compared to the other departments at METU. Moreover, considering the following departments ranked after Department of English Language Teaching in terms of applicant numbers, it is possible to observe a high-level participation from the four departments that constitute the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, namely Business Administration, International Relations, Political Science and Public Administration and Economics departments.

On the other hand, it is important to note that the table shows the little interest from the engineering departments at METU although they involve a considerable portion of the general student population of the institution. To illustrate, in the fall semester of 2016–2017 academic year, there were a total of 7346 (METU Registrar's Office Annual Activity Report, 2016) undergraduate students who are enrolled in an engineering program at METU while only 266 of them made an application to participate in the program. On the contrary, there had been the same number of applicants (266) from the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences, but only from a total student population of 1978. In other words, the application rate of engineering students is 3% while it is 13% for the students from Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences. At this point, it is important to note that the Registrar's Office data includes the overall number of undergraduate students that are enrolled in the programs. However, considering the minimum CGPA requirement of 2,50 for exchange program application at METU, it is possible to argue that the ratio of applications could be much higher from each department if the data for students who have a CGPA of 2,50 or above were available.

According to Goldstein and Kim (2006), humanities and social science departments are more suitable for exchange programs due to their flexible nature of curricula and requirements in contrast to natural science departments. Thus, the international student exchange frameworks are mostly utilized by the students from the former fields as their academic structure more suitable to enable students to study abroad for

a semester or a year. This is a valid point especially in the case of METU as the Faculty of Engineering is very strict about recognition of the credits that are obtained abroad and spending a period abroad most likely to result in having to repeat the exchange semester at METU to make-up their time abroad for many students from the engineering fields. This strict administrative approach works as a significant obstacle for exchange program participation of the students from engineering fields as it discourages many students who would like to graduate on time and don't want to prolong their studies.

In addition, the departmental profiles of the applicants also have a significant effect on the gender distribution of the sample due to the quantitative dominance of several departments. Salisbury et al. (2010) argue that women students tend to participate in the study abroad programs more than the male students do. Table 6 shows the gender distribution of the applicant cohort of 2017 application period at METU;

Table 6 Gender Distribution among the Applicant Cohort of 2017

Gender	Number of Applicants	Percentage
Woman	638	57.7%
Male	469	42.3%

In line with Goldstein and Kim's (2006) analysis, the top supplier departments of applicants to Erasmus Program are mostly populated by women students. Naturally, this has a direct consequence on the gender distribution of the Erasmus Program participation as the majority of the applicants are women as shown in Table 6. However, woman students' interest in the Erasmus Program cannot only be explained by the numerical superiority in the mentioned fields. As it will be discussed in more detail in the analysis of interview data, most of the women students who participated in this study expressed intentions to use the Erasmus Program participation to get away from domestic pressures and constraints as they believe that a more comfortable social setting awaits them at their destinations. In

line with the domestic political context marked by authoritarian and conservative government, the number of attacks and harassment on women in the public space has risen significantly in the recent years in Turkey. To illustrate, most recently a woman was harassed in one of the public parks in İstanbul. The aftermath of the incident led to nation-wide protests from women organizations with the motto of “Don’t intervene with my dress” (Sozcu, 2017). This example is only one of the countless harassment of women that took place in the public space. Thus, the majority of the women participants in this study mentioned their feelings of insecurity in Turkey as young women, with the exception of campus life at METU. Moreover, some also stressed that being away from their parents is an attraction for them. Therefore, explaining the gender distribution in Erasmus Program participation only in terms of numerical data would overlook important social and cultural aspects of the issue, especially in the case of this study.

One of the important characteristics of the overall sample is the applicants’ study years. At this point, it is important to note that students make their applications to participate in Erasmus Program in the following academic year after their initial applications. That is to say, for instance, students who are in their 1st year at their departments will participate in the program in their 2nd year. Table 7 below shows us the numbers of undergraduate students along with Master and PhD level students who made their applications in 2016-2017 academic year;

Table 7 Number of Applicants Based on Study Years

Year	Number of Applicants	Percentage
1 st	78	7%
2 nd	463	41.8%
3 rd	348	31.4%
4 th	47	4.2%
MS	123	11%
PhD	48	4.3%

As illustrated by the numbers, the vast majority of the applicants are in their 2nd and 3rd year of studies while the 1st year and PhD level students represent the lowest application rates. This is mainly due to the fact that elective courses in many departments at METU become available in the 2nd and 3rd years in the undergraduate programs' curricula. Therefore, students find it easier to find courses during their Erasmus period which will be recognized at METU and enable them to collect the required amount of credits to graduate on time as elective courses are recognized much more easily than the must courses in many departments at METU. On the other hand, 4th-year students who apply to the program will have to prolong, or they must have been already prolonged, their studies in order to participate in the program. Remaining course load at the amount of 30 ECTS is one of the application criteria for the Erasmus Program at METU. At the graduate level of studies, most students tend to carry on their thesis studies abroad and usually try to avoid taking courses at their host institutions as they either finish their course-loads at METU before going for an exchange semester or they simply prefer to have more free time on their hands without attending courses.

Finally, Table 8 below illustrates the top 10 most preferred destinations by the applicants. As mentioned in the second chapter, METU possesses 321 inter-institutional Erasmus agreements with higher education institutions in 29 of the 32 available program countries. However, at this point, it is also important to consider the distribution of these inter-institutional Erasmus agreements in terms of the home country of these partner higher education institutions among program countries. These numbers show that Germany (65), France (35), United Kingdom (30), Italy (29) and Spain (20) are the leading countries in terms of the number of inter-institutional Erasmus agreements that METU has, as of June 2017.

Table 8 Most Preferred Destinations by the Applicants

Country	Number of Applicants	Percentage
Germany	256	23%
The Netherlands	183	16.5%
Czech Republic	86	7.7%
Spain	85	7.7%
Poland	82	7.4%
The UK	75	6.7%
Italy	58	5.2%
France	46	4.1%
Denmark	41	3.7%
Portugal	31	2.8%

While the numbers above provide a good picture in terms of students' preferred destinations and METU's institutional orientation for the use of Erasmus Program, it is also important to note that there are different processes at play in terms of the availability of the Erasmus agreements. That is to say, apart from several Erasmus agreements that were made by the university administration, the vast majority of agreements are restricted in terms of the concerned fields as departments have their own partner lists. To illustrate, while the Department of Architecture at METU usually tends to establish partnerships in Italy and the Netherlands, there is a domination of German higher institutions in the partner lists of departments in the field of social sciences. Each applicant makes his or her selection among the partner institutions that are available to them. Still, Table 9 is an important indicator in terms of presenting a picture of the student flow from METU to European countries within the framework of Erasmus Program.

4.1.2 The Survey

As described previously, Erasmus Program applicant profile at METU in 2017 application period is comprised of predominantly women, 2nd and 3rd-year students from the Humanity fields who most likely to spend a study period at higher education institutions in Germany, the Netherlands, Czech Republic, Spain or the United Kingdom. Moreover, the average age of the applicants is 22.6.

However, the survey conducted within the framework of this research is specifically designed to go beyond the basic characteristics of the applicants mentioned above and to cover the demographic and socio-economic economic characteristics of the applicants in addition to including the students' aspirations at the pre-application phase, their expectations from the Erasmus Program, their career planning and future migration plans.

4.1.2.1 Demographic Characteristics

In terms of gender distribution, survey participation favors women students more with 62% women students to 36% male students. In contrast, there is 57.7% women to 42.3% male ratio in the actual number applicants in the sample universe. 6 informants refused to answer the gender question in the survey. Table 9 below illustrates the gender distribution in the survey sample;

Table 9 Gender Distribution of Participants in the Survey

Gender	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Woman	261	62.00%
Male	154	36.58%
No answer	6	1.43%

Departmental patterns in the survey in terms of the distribution of the applicants are in line with the applicant cohort's departmental profile. Students from 37 different departments participated in the survey with the most number of students coming from the Departments of English Language Teaching, Business Administration, Architecture, International Relations, Political Science and Public Administration, Sociology, Psychology and Economics, Industrial Engineering and Industrial Design. Table 10 shows the top 10 departments in terms of number of participants in the survey;

Table 10 Top 10 Departments in terms of Participating Student Numbers

Department	No. of Respondents	Percentage
English Language Teaching	32	7.60%
Business Administration	31	7.36%
Architecture	30	7.13%
International Relations	30	7.13%
Political Science And Public Adm.	28	6.65%
Sociology	26	6.18%
Psychology	25	5.94%
Economics	23	5.46%
Industrial Engineering	20	4.75%
Industrial Design	16	3.80%

The representation of the applicants' study years also seems to be accurate as the 2nd and 3rd year students are the highest proportion while the 1st year and PhD level students are in the lowest in terms of participation in the survey. The distribution of participants in the survey in terms of their study years is shown on Table 11;

Table 11 Study Years of Participants in the Survey

Study year	No. of Respondents	Percentage
1 st year	35	8.31%
2 nd year	162	38.48%
3 rd year	125	29.69%
4 th year	20	4.75%
MS	53	12.59%
PhD	20	4.75%

When asked about their place of residence prior to higher education, it has been found out that the vast majority of the applicants either coming from one of the 3 biggest cities in Turkey, namely İstanbul, Ankara or İzmir, or they were residing in one of the large cities with population up to 1 million prior to enrolling to METU. It is possible to observe a strong urban background in the sample. This is to be expected when the general student profile of METU is considered. Table 12 illustrates the participants' place of residence prior to higher education;

Table 12 Place of Residency Prior to Higher Education

Place of Residence Prior to Higher Education	No.	Percentage
İstanbul-Ankara-İzmir	264	62.71%
Metropolitan City Center	73	17.34%
Small or mid-level City (50.000 to 250.000 population)	35	8.31%
Province	35	8.31%
Town-Village	7	1.66%

4.1.2.2 Socio-economic Background of the Applicants

According to Gonzalez et al. (2011), the family's educational background positively affects students' academic performance as it is also shown that having parents with tertiary education encourages students' Erasmus Program participation. This research confirms this pattern in the case of METU.

In terms of mother's education level, more than 77% of the participants have mothers who at least have a high school or higher degree. When only focused on mothers with the tertiary education degree, it is seen that 52% of the participants' mothers have at least tertiary education degree and higher. Table 13 illustrates participants' mothers' education level;

Table 13 Mother's Education

Education Level	No. of Respondents	Percentage
No education	3	0.71%
Primary school	60	14.25%
Middle school	24	5.70%
High school	107	25.42%
Two-year associate degree	25	5.94%
Tertiary education degree (1 st level)	161	38.24%
Post-graduate degree (2 nd level)	23	5.46%
Post-graduate degree (3 rd level)	10	2.38%
No answer	8	1.90%

Moreover, Table 14 below shows the cross-tabulation of participants' mothers' education and students' plans after graduation. Mothers' education level is intentionally selected over father's educational background as it is fair to argue that mothers' educational background could be considered as an important signifier of the family's overall educational level.

Table 14 Cross-tabulation of Students' Plans after Graduation and the Mother's Educational Background

			Graduation plans * Mother's Education Cross-tabulation								
			Mother's Education								Total
			No Edu.	Primary	Middle	High	Associate	UG	MS	PhD	
Graduation plans	Academic Career	Count	0	19	9	28	7	56	8	4	131
		% within Graduation plans	0.0%	14.5%	6.9%	21.4%	5.3%	42.7%	6.1%	3.1%	100.0%
	Entering Job Market	Count	2	14	10	28	6	28	2	1	91
		% within Graduation plans	2.2%	15.4%	11.0%	30.8%	6.6%	30.8%	2.2%	1.1%	100.0%
	Master's degree	Count	0	17	3	34	10	57	13	3	137
		% within Graduation plans	0.0%	12.4%	2.2%	24.8%	7.3%	41.6%	9.5%	2.2%	100.0%
	I will think about it for a while	Count	0	7	1	7	2	13	0	1	31
		% within Graduation plans	0.0%	22.6%	3.2%	22.6%	6.5%	41.9%	0.0%	3.2%	100.0%
	Other	Count	1	3	0	8	0	7	0	0	19
		% within Graduation plans	5.3%	15.8%	0.0%	42.1%	0.0%	36.8%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	Count		60	23	105	25	161	23	9	409	
	% within Graduation plans		14.7%	5.6%	25.7%	6.1%	39.4%	5.6%	2.2%	100.0%	

As it is illustrated in the table, it is possible to argue that the main distinction can be made between the students who are planning to pursue an academic career and who are thinking about entering the job market. Students with mothers who have tertiary education tend to focus more on the academic prospects for their future, rather than entering the job market. Moreover, it is also possible to argue that choosing to pursue an academic career through Master and PhD studies usually signals a high probability of further international mobility for the students. This assumption is backed by the empirical findings which will be provided later on this study.

However, graduate studies can be considered as a preferable path for students who wish the move abroad after their graduation.

On the other hand, applicants' fathers appear to be more educated than their mothers are as this is expected in Turkey's case. 63.5% of the applicants have a father who holds a higher education degree. Table 15 covers the participants' fathers' education level of survey participants;

Table 15 Father's Education

Education Level	No. of Respondents	Percentage
No education	0	0.00%
Primary school	28	6.65%
Middle school	34	8.08%
High school	84	19.95%
Two-year associate degree	19	4.51%
Tertiary education degree (1st level)	196	46.56%
Post-graduate degree (2nd level)	31	7.36%
Post-graduate degree (3rd level)	21	4.99%
No answer	8	1.90%

The survey also aimed to gather data in terms of parental occupation of the Erasmus applicants. To start with, in terms of mothers, not working mothers are the biggest proportion of 32.54%. Mothers who are not working are followed by mid-level public servants and retired mothers in terms of mother's occupation. Table 16 below illustrates the participants' mothers' occupation;

Table 16 Mother's Occupation

Occupation	No.	Percentage
Not working	137	32.54%
Worker	18	4.28%
Public servant (mid-level, e.g. Teacher, working in government offices)	78	18.53%
Public servant (high level, e.g. Specialist, manager, administrator)	27	6.41%
Professional on his/her own account (e.g. Doctor, lawyer, engineer, architect)	13	3.09%
Small employer (1-10 employees)	15	3.56%
Employer (10+ employees)	1	0.24%
Trade on his/her own account (small)	10	2.38%
Trade on his/her own account (big)	0	0.00%
Retired (working another job)	15	3.56%
Retired (not working)	98	23.28%

Concerning the fathers' occupation, mid-level public servants and retired fathers are the most dominant in the sample. However, it is important to note that there is also a significant amount of fathers who are retired from their original jobs and maintained active in the job market for another job. Participants' fathers' occupation is illustrated in Table 17;

Table 17 Father's Occupation

Occupation	No.	Percentage
Not working	14	3.33%
Worker	37	8.79%
Public servant (mid-level, e.g. Teacher, working in government offices)	57	13.54%
Public servant (high level, e.g. Specialist, manager, administrator)	40	9.50%
Professional on his/her own account (e.g. Doctor, lawyer, engineer, architect)	34	8.08%
Small employer (1-10 employees)	18	4.28%
Employer (10+ employees)	14	3.33%
Trade on his/her own account (small)	24	5.70%
Trade on his/her own account (big)	3	0.71%
Retired (working another job)	56	13.30%
Retired (not working)	116	27.55%

Based on these findings, it is possible to argue that students are mainly coming from middle-class families. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1986) conceptualization of cultural capital, Waters (2006) argues that middle-class families tend to support strongly their children's international education as it is considered as an important opportunity to obtain a valuable form of cultural capital.

The data on the monthly income of the family, in addition to parental occupation and parental education determinants, supports the claim of this study in regard to wider participation patterns from students with the middle-class background. To illustrate, the majority of the participants' parents are holding tertiary education degree. Moreover, in terms of parental occupation, it is revealed that a significant proportion of parents who are either mid to high-level public servants as well as the high numbers of retired parents. Income wise, the average monthly income of applicants' families has been found to be €1125,9. At this point, it is important to note that the minimum monthly wage in Turkey is €349,2 (TR Ministry of Labour and Social Security, 2017) while the average annual income in the country is €4108,4 (TÜİK, 2016).

On the other hand, when looked into the monthly budget of the students, it was found out that students receiving roughly €250 per month. This shows how a crucial role the Erasmus funds play in terms of students' participation in the program. Strikingly, 74% of the respondents also stated that they would have been unable to participate in the program if they did not receive Erasmus grant. Moreover, 31% of the students stated that they are receiving scholarships in addition to the financial support from their families.

Finally, it is possible to argue that most families make an economic sacrifice to cover the costs of an Erasmus period abroad. Therefore, it is important that the participants have their shares from their families' economic resources as they are still financially supported by their parents. As the data revealed, 75% of the applicants either have no siblings or one sibling only. Moreover, only 28% of the students have a sibling who is currently enrolled in higher education. The numbers show us that the Erasmus participation of students become a careful investment for many families who are among the middle-income levels.

4.1.2.3 Previous Mobility Experience

As discussed previously, the literature on international student mobility predominantly argues that students' previous mobility experiences, especially to abroad, strongly influence the likelihood to be mobile again (see Murphy- Lejeune 2002, Brooks and Waters 2010, Carlson 2011). However, in this study, it is observed that 52% percent of the applicants have never been abroad or they spent up to two weeks abroad. That is to say, more than half of the Erasmus applicants at METU will experience a foreign country for a significant time-period for the first time in their lives. This finding also corresponds with one of the important claims of this study as Erasmus Program being one of the only opportunities for students to go abroad. Table 18 shows participants' previous exposure to abroad;

Table 18 International Experience Prior to Exchange Mobility

Duration of Stay Abroad	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Never been abroad before	132	31.35%
1 - 2 weeks	89	21.14%
2 weeks - 1 month	50	11.88%
1 - 3 months	56	13.30%
3 - 6 months	45	10.69%
6 months - 1 year	19	4.51%
1 year or longer	21	4.99%
No answer	9	2.14%

Moreover, when asked if they have anyone in their nuclear families who studied abroad, 20% of the applicants stated that at least one of their nuclear family members studied abroad. On the other hand, 46.56% of the students participated in the survey responded that they have at least one relative living abroad. However, when asked if having a relative abroad had any influence on their destination choices, only 11.16% of the applicants confirmed that their choice had affected by the relatives living abroad. In fact, in during the interviews, interviewees who have relatives abroad insisted that they intentionally made their country selection to spend their exchange periods away from their relatives. Students consider the countries in which one of their relatives is living to be more accessible and easier to get in. For their Erasmus periods, students tend to prefer destinations that are more distant and unknown to them. Moreover, it is also possible to argue that they would like to keep their Erasmus experience away from the supervision of their family members.

4.1.2.4 Attitude towards Erasmus Program

The positive response that Erasmus Program gets from students has been previously discussed in this study. The findings confirm the recognition that this program receives from the students as 77% of the informants stated that they knew about the program before starting higher education while 52% of them first heard the program from one of their friends. Moreover, 65% of the applicants responded that their friends who participated in the program were the most influential source regarding their decision to apply to the program. This shows us that the way Erasmus Program became a trend among students. It is also possible to argue that Turkey got its share of the “Erasmus Generation”, a term that is often used in Europe to refer to the more than 3 million students who participated in the Erasmus Program in the last 30 years after its implementation.

On the other hand, the data also shows that students get a strong encouragement from their parents to participate in the program. 77.20% of the students stated that their parents support their participation in the program.

Finally, when asked which country would have the applicants have preferred if there were not any kind of limitations, top 5 choices were presented as the UK (28.74%), the Netherlands (14.01%), Spain (10.21%), Germany (9.50%) and Italy (6.65%). Table 19 shows the top preferred destinations if students did not have any limitations for their Erasmus Program applications. Moreover, the percentage of the preference ratio of these destinations in the actual application is also included in the table;

Table 19 Most Preferred Destinations without Limiting Factors

Country	No. of Respondents	Percentage	Percentage in the Actual Application
The UK	121	28.74%	6.8%
The Netherlands	59	14.01%	16.5%
Spain	43	10.21%	7.7%
Germany	40	9.50%	23.1%
Italy	28	6.65%	5.2%

At this point, it is important to compare the responses to this question with the original application data in which the only 6.7% of the applicants preferred the UK as their first choice. In contrast, the data above shows us the UK would have been the top destination if the applicants had no limitations for their preferences. As it will be focused on in more detail when analyzing the interview data, this distinction again shows the economic aspect of the Erasmus participation. The UK is the most expensive country in terms of the living costs among other possible destinations and although the prestige of host institutions and the language in the UK can be considered as significant attractions for some students, they are forced to avoid selecting the partner universities in the UK. Instead, they make more strategic

choices such as Germany, Czech Republic and Poland where the costs of living are much more affordable when compared to the UK.

4.1.2.5 Projection of the Erasmus Experience by the Students

In the survey, students were also asked about the possible challenges or problems that may face during their time abroad. The most prominent of these challenges seems to be the financial one for students. According to the analysis, 56% of the students believe that they will likely to have financial problems during their Erasmus participation. It is important to note that while 29% of the participants stated that they are unsure whether they will have financial problems, only the 10% responded that they won't have any problems in terms of the financial aspect of their mobility.

On the other hand, it seems that most of the applicants are pretty confident in terms of their adaptation to another culture. While 19% of the participants concluded that they are likely to suffer from a culture shock, 56% of them stated that they are not expecting to suffer from such problem. Finally, 20% of the applicants stated that they are unsure about the possibility of suffering from a culture shock. At this point, it is important to note that previous mobility experience of students is expected to play a significant role in students' projection of future mobility experience. From this perspective, Table 20 shows the cross-tabulation of students' previous mobility experience and their attitude towards a possible culture shock during their study period abroad;

Table 20 The Effect of Previous Mobility Experience on Culture Shock Expectations

Previous Mobility Experience * Possibility of Culture Shock Cross-tabulation								
			Possibility of Culture Shock					Total
			Definitely No	No	Not sure	Yes	Definitely Yes	
Been Abroad	No	Count	17	42	29	30	6	124
		% within Been Abroad	13.7%	33.9%	23.4%	24.2%	4.8%	100.0%
	Yes	Count	58	115	55	36	10	274
		% within Been Abroad	21.2%	42.0%	20.1%	13.1%	3.6%	100.0%
Total		Count	75	157	84	66	16	398
		% within Been Abroad	18.8%	39.4%	21.1%	16.6%	4.0%	100.0%

The data shows that there is a slight difference between students who went abroad before and who do not have that experience in terms of expecting a culture shock during the period of study abroad as students with previous mobility experience are more confident that they will not suffer from culture shock. On the other hand, the students who will be going abroad for the first time with Erasmus Program seem to be more hesitant about the possibility of culture shock. Still, the differences are slight and the data illustrates that students are generally confident about adapting to their new settings regardless of their previous international experiences.

It is possible to argue that this confidence in terms of cultural adaptation may stem from the English proficiency of METU students. As highlighted previously, English

is the medium of instruction at METU and students take additional English proficiency examinations to participate in the Erasmus Program. The analysis shows that 64% of the applicants believe that they will not have any problems in terms of language during their study abroad period. Moreover, 46% of the participants also believe that participating in the program, as a METU student will have significant benefits during their study.

Although the data show that students are generally confident in terms of the projection of their mobility experience, one of their main concerns seems to be the possibility of facing problems during their mobility due to the fact that they are participating from Turkey. 31% of the participants think that coming from Turkey will create problems for them while 34% of them is unsure if they face any problems regarding this aspect. The rising xenophobia in Europe and Turkey's political hassles with the EU may be considered as two important factors influencing this stance. Furthermore, it is important to note that this concern became more evident during the interviews. Most of the interviewees were hesitant and insecure in terms of the connotations of being a Turkish national in Europe, mainly due to the recent political developments and tensions in the country and with Europe. Further elaboration of this issue will be provided when analyzing the interview data.

Students are also seem to be to very focused in terms of grasping what the Erasmus experience has to offer them during their study period abroad. To illustrate, it is possible to observe a strong orientation towards the intention of traveling and seeing new places during the Erasmus exchange period. 93% of the students are planning to visit another city in their destination country while 80% of them intend to visit another country in Europe during their semester abroad. As it was discussed previously, participating in the Erasmus Program gives students a platform to be mobile and go beyond the European borders which otherwise is a challenging attempt without the guarantee of Erasmus Program. As the findings show, students tend to make the most this opportunity and travel as much as possible.

When looked into the meaning attributed by participants to the Erasmus Program, it turned out that the participants highly value their Erasmus participation up to the point that considering their participation in the program as a life changing experience. 85% of the participants think that their Erasmus experience will change their lives considerably. While %7 percent of the applicants are unsure whether it will have a significant effect on their lives, only %3 of the participants stated that Erasmus experience will not have any significant effect on their life trajectories. Furthermore, 88% of the participants believe that their Erasmus participation will have an important and positive effect on their career prospects. Only 2% of the participants think that Erasmus participation will not have any positive influence on their future careers. The numbers show us the strong meaning and expectations that are attributed to the Erasmus Program by the students.

Finally, the analysis also shows that students are also considering the Erasmus participation as an initiation of possible future migration. 80% of the students believe that their Erasmus experience would play an important role in case they decide to emigrate to another country in the future. It is possible to argue that for many participants, Erasmus Program works as a big incentive as they believe that it enhances and even empowers them on many different levels from personality traits to future migration aspirations.

To illustrate, when asked about their primary goals after the graduation from university, 63% of the participants responded that they would like to continue their studies at the post-graduate level while 21% of them expressed that they would like to start working immediately after their graduation. However, when asked whether they have any plans to move to another country after graduation, a vast majority of the participants expressed their willingness to leave Turkey for a destination abroad. 84% percent of the participants stated that they would like move to another country after graduation, with the purposes of education (42.76%), job experience (12.83%), permanent residence (27.32%) and other purposes (1.19%). Only 1.9% of the respondents noted that they have no plans regarding moving abroad while 11.64% of

them stated that they have not think about it yet. Students’ future plans to move abroad are illustrated in Table 21;

Table 21 Future International Mobility Plans

Plans to move abroad after university graduation	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Education (post-graduate studies)	180	42.76%
Permanent residence	115	27.32%
For a period of time to gain job experience	54	12.83%
Haven't thought yet	49	11.64%
No answer	10	2.38%
I don't have any plans to move abroad	8	1.90%
Other purposes	5	1.19%

On the other hand, in terms of the effect of students’ previous mobility experience on future mobility plans, it is possible to argue that the future mobility plans do not significantly change due the previous experience. Table 22 shows the cross-tabulation of previous mobility experience and future mobility plans;

Table 22 The Effect of Previous Mobility Experience on Future Mobility Plans

Previous Mobility * Plans to Live Abroad After Graduation Cross-tabulation									
			Plans to Live Abroad After Graduation						Total
			MS / PhD	Job	Residence	No Plan	No Idea	Other	
Been Abroad	No	Count	55	16	29	4	23	1	128
		% within Been Abroad	43.0%	12.5%	22.7%	3.1%	18.0%	0.8%	100.0%
	Yes	Count	124	38	84	4	24	4	278
		% within Been Abroad	44.6%	13.7%	30.2%	1.4%	8.6%	1.4%	100.0%
Total		Count	179	54	113	8	47	5	406
		% within Been Abroad	44.1%	13.3%	27.8%	2.0%	11.6%	1.2%	100.0%

This picture shows that there is a very small difference between previously mobile and non-mobile students in terms of their future mobility aspirations. As discussed previously, the participants are highly determined concerning their plans to move abroad after they finish their degrees at METU. Although it can be argued that the previously mobile students are slightly more confident, the prospects of moving abroad seem to be a significant attraction for most of the students regardless of their mobility experiences. Therefore, it is possible to argue that, the previous mobility experience determinant in international student mobility, as often emphasized in the concerned literature, does not play a significant role in terms of facilitating mobility of individuals in METU's case.

In conclusion, the survey data reveals the key characteristics and motivations of the Erasmus Program applicants at METU. Moreover, it enabled us to make a comparison of the findings with the existing literature on Erasmus Program in particular and international student mobility phenomenon in general. To sum up, it is possible to see a determined group of students at METU who intend to make the most of somewhat a significant opportunity presented by Erasmus Program. It is fair to argue that the institutional context also plays an important role in this trait of the students. From the first year of their studies, students at METU take incentive English language courses, most of the faculty staff are alumni of the higher education institutions from abroad and METU culture generally favors international experiences as well as liberal values. Furthermore, strong patterns of gender, parental education and occupation, monthly income of the families and lack of previous mobility experiences in terms of students' backgrounds are seen.

When compared to the existing literature on international student mobility and Erasmus Program, the case of METU fits into the general framework drawn from the previous studies in terms of socio-economic background of the applicants, departmental and demographic profiles, gender distribution of the participants, and general motivations and expectations from Erasmus participation such as cultural interaction, linguistic development and career prospects (see Findlay et al. 2006, Souto-Otero and McCoshan 2006, Munk, 2009, Brooks and Waters 2010, Gonzalez et al. 2011). To illustrate, in terms of gender, it has been repeatedly shown in the literature that women students are more likely be mobile. Students from middle-class backgrounds present the highest portion of applicants and it is observed that socio-economic background play an important role in Erasmus Program participation.

Moreover, the crucial role played by the available Erasmus funds is also revealed. It is also important to note that the vast majority of the participants will be the first ones to study abroad. On the other hand, it turned out that despite all the institutional promotion and support, social environment, especially the peers who participated in

the program is one of the most influential sources for program participation of the students. In terms of career prospects, it is evident that applicants value Erasmus participation very highly and they believe that their participation would be very beneficial for them in the long run. In addition to the economic factors, students long to be mobile during their semesters abroad which can be interpreted as a part of the youth culture of mobility. Moreover, a striking portion of the applicants has plans to move abroad either for a short term or for a permanent residence and they believe that the Erasmus experience will be highly beneficial in their pursuit to move abroad in the future.

However, the case of METU differs from studies in the literature in terms the emphasis on the previous mobility experience. This study shows us that Erasmus participation will be the first considerable international mobility experience for many students. However, considering the future plans of the students, it is possible to argue that their Erasmus experience will be an initiation to open the door for a long term mobility experience for students such as traveling to other countries during their semester abroad or moving to another country once they are graduated.

On the other hand, it is possible to argue that actual distinction and contribution of this study to the concerned literature will be revealed in the next section, in which the analysis of the interview data will be made. The significance of Erasmus phenomenon in Turkey can be understood in the context of themes such as family's involvement in the process both in emotional and economic terms, the influence of the domestic political scene, the gender dimension, the perceived meaning of being a Turkish national in Europe, the competitive aspect of the Erasmus participation and the utilization of Erasmus experience for the future mobility plans.

4.1.3 The Interviews

The question set for the interviews was designed to cover topics such as students' first encounter with the Erasmus Program, their expectations from participating in the program, their parents' involvement in the general process and future mobility plans. The full question set of the interviews can be found in Appendix B.

Although the aim for the interview sample was to provide a representative picture in terms of the key characteristics of the applicant cohort in regard to gender, department and study level, this study also very much valued and prioritized the voluntary participation of the students who responded positively to the invitation e-mail that they received. That is to say, listening to the students who are open to sharing their part of the story is as important as having a strictly representative sample. From this perspective, the sample for the interviews consisted of 10 women, 9 male informants while 14 of them being undergraduate and 5 of the informants being Master's degree students. Moreover, students from 5 different faculties and 2 graduate schools at METU participated in the interviews. All of the interviewees have been assigned a pseudonym to maintain their anonymity throughout the study. The general overview of the interview sample can be found in Appendix C.

As discussed previously, the aim of this study is to reflect on students' perspectives in regard to participating in the Erasmus Program. The qualitative data, especially from the in-depth interviews, play an important role to be able to do so. As Findlay et al. (2005) argue, a comprehensive understanding and reflection of the international student mobility phenomenon can only be achieved through in-depth interviews with the students who are actually participating in it.

Thus, in this section of the study, the analysis of the interview data will be provided in regard to several aspects of students' perspectives and experiences. The discussion will start with students' general perception of the Erasmus Program including their first encounter and their understanding of the program. It will continue under the

themes as follows; the application phase to the program and decision-making process, students' expectations from the Erasmus Program and their projection of the future mobility, the family's involvement in the Erasmus participation process in emotional and financial terms, the effect of Turkey's domestic political context on Erasmus Program application, and finally, the students' future migration plans.

4.1.3.1 Perception of the Erasmus Program

As discussed previously several times in this study, the Erasmus Program received a significant recognition from the higher education students in Turkey. The findings in the survey data also confirmed this as it was revealed that the vast majority of the participants knew about the program prior to their higher education studies started. The results of the survey data also put forward that the peer culture and social setting are crucial determinants of the Erasmus Program participation as most of the students first heard about the program from one of their friends. Furthermore, the majority of the participants also stated that their friends who participated in the program were the most influential source regarding their decision to apply to the program. Thus, it is possible to argue that the program is very well embedded in the peer culture of the students.

4.1.3.1.1 The First Encounter with the Erasmus Program

When asked about their first encounter with Erasmus Program, the vast majority of the interviewees could not refer to a specific moment but they stressed that they first heard about the program from their social environments. Also, in some cases, the promotion of the program from the faculty staff or teachers in high school was also helped them to get to know about Erasmus Program as Phyllis notes;

You actually hear about it from everyone, like I will go to Erasmus and such. But our English teacher in the high school was very influential; she was promoting it all the time. I always had it in my mind to participate. (Phyllis, woman, ELT Department, 1st year student, going to Italy)

On the other hand, Dwight talked about how he became aware of the program by the participation of his friends once he started higher education;

I was hearing about Erasmus as a kind of myth. But I fully realized it when came here (METU), many of my friends participated, especially my friends from high school. They went to Italy, Finland, Denmark and Germany (Dwight, male, PADM, 3rd year student, going to Greece)

In some cases, the revelation about Erasmus Program comes with acknowledging the possibility of going abroad for studying. Furthermore, some interviewees also stated that the university's Erasmus Program facilities played an important role in their university selection after graduating from high school. Holly, for example, notes how she became aware of the program when she realized that it could be utilized to go abroad. She also mentioned the role of the Erasmus facilities of METU playing an important role when deciding about her university preferences;

I first heard about it in the 9th grade in high school. My cousin was participating and I asked her "how do you go abroad, isn't it too expensive?" She told me first and I have it in my mind since. I even looked to Erasmus possibilities when I was making my university preferences and made my choices accordingly. I looked at METU's Erasmus facilities and saw that it has agreements with lots of universities, including Sciences Po. I just preferred METU after that. (Holly, woman, IR, 3rd year student, going to Germany)

On a personal note, as an employee of the METU ICO, I can also confirm the interest in the program from the prospective students who are making their university preferences. Candidate students, along with their parents, frequently visit the office to get to know more about international student exchange programs when they participate in the "METU Promotion Days" which are organized each year after the university entrance exam. The picture above shows us the success and recognition that the Erasmus Program had achieved in Turkey so far.

4.1.3.1.2 The Personal Interpretation of the Erasmus Program

On the other hand, when asked about their personal understanding of the program, many of the interviewees also explained the value they attributed to the Erasmus Program. Angela and Andy, below, explain how they consider Erasmus participation as a top level achievement;

Erasmus? I think it is the greatest thing that I could do while studying. There is not much I can move towards besides Erasmus at my department. (Angela, woman, ELT, 1st year student, going to Italy)

In the simplest explanation, Erasmus is the best 6 months or 1 year that one can ever spend in another country as a cultural exchange. (Andy, male, ELT, 1st year student, going to Germany)

Stanley, on the other hand, expressed that how he considered as Erasmus Program participation as a signifier of success before, but now he thinks that it is the quickest route to Europe and moving away from Turkey;

When first heard about it before starting university, I thought that participating in the Erasmus Program was a criterion for being successful, like only the best students are participating in it. But, it turned out that it really isn't something like that. For me, it is the easiest possible way to spend time in Europe, and also for getting away from Turkey. (Stanley, male, ID, 2nd year student, going to Germany)

As discussed previously, Erasmus Program is one of the very few opportunities that are present to higher education students in Turkey. In addition, the visa procedures and economic constraints in term of travel make Erasmus participation a valuable opportunity for students who wish to study abroad or simply to have new experiences.

4.1.3.1.3 The Others' Erasmus Experience

On the other hand, it is possible to argue that the general positive opinion of the students about the Erasmus Program stems from their understanding of the Erasmus experience which is observed and acquired through other Erasmus Program

participants such as from some acquaintances or their friends. To illustrate, when asked about whether they observed some general patterns on the people who participated in the Erasmus Program the meaning that is attributed to the program among students became more visible. The Erasmus participation is usually connoted with the positive images stemming from the others' experiences. Louise and Dwight talked about how they noticed the frequent traveling of their students during their periods abroad. Moreover, it is also possible to observe a mild resentment in their tone as they feel that they are deprived of doing the things that their friends are experiencing;

They travel a lot. Also, I had lots of friends who learned a new language. They meet new people and I see that they are having a good time. They are actually doing the things we are dreaming of here. (Louise, woman, ID, 2nd year student, going to Italy)

The bastards travel a lot. I mean all the time. For example, my friend went to Poland last year and he literally spent less time in Poland, he traveled to other countries. You see it from the social media. It makes me feel envious. (Dwight, male, PADM, 3rd year student, going to Greece)

The emphasis on travel in these quotes is significant in terms of detecting the concepts that are generally associated with Erasmus mobility. Furthermore, it also shows us how students value mobility and being able to travel within Europe which is a challenging task in normal circumstances without the Erasmus Program framework.

Jim, on the other hand, says that he has been able to observe closely the effects of Erasmus Program participation as his girlfriend spent a semester in the Netherlands. He describes the transformation that his girlfriend went through as follows;

My girlfriend went to the Netherlands with Erasmus. I mean it was hard for our relationship but I was able to observe how she improved herself in there. There was a difference between the person who went there and the one came back. She was timid in inter-personal relations; she was not really an extrovert person and she wouldn't express herself comfortably. But I saw that she overcame these things when she came back. She also improved herself a lot in terms of language ability. (Jim, male, STAT, 4th year student, going to Germany)

Another interviewee, Stanley, answered the question from a different perspective by suggesting that it was obvious for him that who would participate in the Erasmus Program among his peers;

I was actually kind of able to guess who would participate in the Erasmus Program when I looked to my classmates. There is a certain kind of person; I do not know how to describe it exactly. Maybe more relaxed and extrovert. Most of them have a tendency for English, American culture, series and all. They all come from private schools usually. (Stanley, male, ID, 2nd year student, going to Germany)

From this perspective, it can be argued that although student mobility is considered to be the result of an individual decision-making process, the others or the friends in this case play an important role in students' perception and participation in the Erasmus Program. Thus, it is possible to argue that students' decision to participate in the program should not be contextualized without the social relations and the settings that the students are embedded in as Carlson (2011) argues.

4.1.3.2 The Application Phase

Until so far, the focus has been on the perceived image and meaning of Erasmus Program from the students' perspective. It is possible to argue that the students who are interested in the Erasmus Program at METU are not limited only to the applicant cohort. At this point, it is important to focus on the application phase to understand under what circumstances and which frame of mind that these students differed from their peers as they took the initiative to apply to participate in the program.

4.1.3.2.1 Deciding to Apply

When asked about how did they decide to apply for the Erasmus Program, it turned out that the students have their own specific contexts and personal agendas rather than having a consensus on application aspirations. Based on the general attitudes of the interviewees, it is possible to distinguish two types of applicants; those who are

determined and making an attempt to participate in the program as a part of a long term plan as opposed to the students who apply in a more arbitrary and incidental manner.

To illustrate, Andy and Oscar below tell how going abroad was part of their long term plans starting from high school and they are utilizing the Erasmus opportunity for themselves;

The reason for my application actually was my failed attempt for Comenius Program in the high school. Also, as much as it pains me to say this; but I don't feel that I belong to Turkey. Ok, I don't feel that I belong to anywhere but especially I don't identify myself with the Turkish culture and the things happening here. I feel distanced from the community. That is why I am on the pursuit for new places. Erasmus is the most realistic and affordable thing to experience abroad. (Andy, male, ELT, 1st year student, going to Germany)

I did not put Erasmus as a specific goal but even during the high school years I thought that my destiny lies in abroad. That is why, I was going to make use of any opportunity and not just focus on only one thing. That is why I am using this opportunity. Erasmus is an established program and it has academic ties as well. You show your educational background when you put it to your CV. The period you spent there gets more credible with this. (Oscar, male, IR, 3rd year student, going to the UK)

As illustrated in the students' statements above, Erasmus Program is not at the center of their attention but they are using it as an opportunity to carry out their personal, long term aspirations. At this point, it is possible to argue that the Erasmus Program's general discourse in terms of developing linguistic skills, cultural interaction and career prospects as King et al. (2010) argue, overlap with students' aspirations. Moreover, the credibility of the Erasmus Program and its facilities in terms of visa procedures and grants also become very significant and attractive for many applicants.

In contrast, it is also possible to see students who apply more incidentally to the program. These are usually the students who would like to make use of their high CGPAs as they consider Erasmus Program participation as a reward or the ones who

just considered available Erasmus funds as a big incentive and wanted to benefit from the program while they are still enrolled in higher education.

Angela, below, explained how she changed her plans when she received a high CGPA and wanted to use it for her Erasmus Program application;

I wasn't actually thinking about applying. I was planning to participate in my 3rd year. But since my CGPA was high, I just wanted to utilize it. Also, the credit transfer was going to be easier if I participate in the 2nd year. We decided to apply as 3 friends together. (Angela, woman, ELT, 1st year student, going to Italy)

Karen, a graduate student, noted that she was attracted by the available funds and wanted to make use of the opportunity presented by Erasmus Program;

I did not really put much consideration in when I was an undergraduate student. We went to Italy with my class and I loved there a lot. That's why I preferred Erasmus. While there is an opportunity like this, 6 months in Italy, with the grant as well. I thought "why not"? Also, a friend of mine was applying as well. (Karen, woman, ARCH, Master's level student, going to Italy)

Similarly, Darryl who holds an EU citizenship with his Bulgarian passport expressed that he did not consider participating in the program in his early undergraduate years but he wanted to benefit from available funds before he finishes his undergraduate degree. His approach to Erasmus Program also significantly differs from other interviewees as he considers Europe as a more accessible space as he is a dual citizen with one of the Member States;

I applied for the first time; I didn't have the intention until now. My CGPA was low as well. This was my last chance to participate; it was an important factor too. Also, since I am a dual citizen (Bulgaria), Europe doesn't feel really distant actually. I don't have to deal with passport or visa. I could have also visited my relatives in Bulgaria but since this was my last chance, I applied to benefit from the grants. I wouldn't have applied to Erasmus if there were no grants. (Darryl, male, PADM, 3rd year student, going to Poland)

4.1.3.2.2 Selecting the Destination

On the other hand, when moving further into the application phase and asking applicants about how they made their destination preferences both as a country and host institution, it is possible to observe different processes and factors at play such as students' affinity to destination country, their relatives living abroad, academic prestige of the host institution and simply the living costs.

Pam remarked that she chose the destination country rather than choosing a host institution for her Erasmus period;

I had both England and Spain on my mind. I guess universities in England require higher overall score to get selected. My first choice was England but I will be going to Spain. I considered Spain as more of a cultural experience. I also always wanted to learn Spanish, so I thought that Erasmus would be a good start. I rather chose the country rather than the university for my Erasmus. (Pam, woman, ELT, 1st year student, going to Spain)

On the other hand, Phyllis and Angela expressed that their relatives in European countries played a role in their destination preferences. However, rather than choosing the countries that their relatives live, they stated that they intentionally did not prefer those countries as they find it more accessible and closer than other possible destinations;

I felt more attracted to Italy. Also, if we consider traveling, I did not want to go to Germany since my aunt lives in Switzerland. It is always easier for me travel around from Switzerland. My friends and the people who went to Italy suggested me to go there. (Phyllis, woman, ELT, 1st year student, going to Italy)

I shared the application process with my mum. I told her the possible countries that I can go, including Germany. My uncle lives there and that is why I didn't want to go there. Germany feels closer and more accessible due to my uncle's presence. It feels easier to go and visit him. I set myself a challenge by avoiding Germany. (Angela, woman, ELT, 1st year student, going to Italy)

The decision-making process in Phyllis and Angela's cases shows us how the students tend to make the most of their Erasmus Program experience. Rather than

choosing the safe option with their relatives, they preferred relatively unknown locations to them and accepted the challenge as well as the adventure. Moreover, their decision-making also contradicts with the consensus in migration theories as Dreher and Poutvaara (2005) argued that migrants usually prefer destinations where they have migrants sharing similar backgrounds in terms of nationality and ethnicity for settling purposes. In this case, countries in which a relative is living are considered more accessible than other countries for participants. Therefore, as Phyllis and Angela stated, it is “always possible” for them to visit those countries through their relatives.

From another perspective, Meredith notes that her sole selection criterion was based on the affordability and living costs;

I made a ranking in terms of living costs. I did not go abroad before, that is why I did not have any criteria while applying. I actually was not really hopeful as well to get selected. (Meredith, woman, CRP, 3rd year student, going to Portugal)

Oscar, on the other hand, talked about the strategic decision he made by combining the academic and economic incentives that influenced his selection of host countries. For him, there were certain places that would worth financial sacrifices as he considered that they would contribute to his academic standing as an International Relations student. Therefore, if those preferences had not succeeded, he would have turned to more affordable options to be able to access the Erasmus experience;

First of all, I was certain that I wanted to experience a different academic style and cultural environment. The question was where to go, and there were some factors that were influential in my decision.

The primary choices for me were England and the Netherlands. If they failed, I was not really attracted to destinations such as Italy, France or Spain. I was going to have financial problems anyway, so I wanted my destination to worth it in terms of my department. If England did not happen, it would not be worth the financial trouble, so I would have turned to Eastern Europe. Now I am going to England and it will be worth the financial challenges. (Oscar, male, IR, 3rd year student, going to the UK)

Erin, a Master's degree student, was actually the only interviewee who stated that she made her selection of the destination based on the host institution by considering the academic aspect of her study period.

Mine was more of an academic decision. The university I will be going is a good institution in my field. The possibility of going there was a very significant factor for my Erasmus application. I also had some friends going there. (Erin, woman, SOC, Master's level student, going to Germany)

The picture presented above shows us the different expectations and motivations from students to apply to the Erasmus Program. Moreover, it also shows us that rather than clear-cut and strictly focused decisions, students tend to make their destination preferences contextual and flexible. It is also important to note that the Erasmus experience overall is valued more by the students than going to a specific country or host institution. Thus, this is, in fact, also related to the limited opportunities that the students have at their disposal for international experience. As discussed previously, most of the participants in this research have no or little previous mobility experience. Moreover, there are no significant alternatives to Erasmus Program in terms of studying abroad considering the duration of the mobility and available funds. That is why students tend to grasp the opportunity that is presented by the program rather than limiting themselves to specific locations or institutions as a destination.

4.1.3.2.3 The Competition

As illustrated earlier, students' Erasmus Program applications at METU are evaluated on the basis of their overall score which is calculated by averaging their CGPA, their CGPAs' standing with their peers and their score from the English proficiency exam. Moreover, students' selection and ranking of the host institutions play a very crucial role in the final results as each department has its own agreement list available to its students, and these agreements with the partner institutions have their own specific quota and criteria. That is to say, students are competing with each

other for the limited vacancies. This creates a competitive aspect in the Erasmus application process. Especially considering that the general trend regarding Erasmus Program among peers and the fact that applicants are competing with their classmates, the tension among prospective applicants becomes inevitable during the application period for Erasmus Program.

Although the vast majority of the informants mentioned challenges of getting selected for Erasmus Program, it was Holly and Stanley who openly acknowledged and confirmed the competitive scene that occurred during the application period when asked about how do students interact in the application phase;

There is lots of competition; it is like the Game of Thrones¹² literally. People are sabotaging each other. I kind of did it as well, but only for the grant. There was a girl, from the 2nd years, who was considering to apply for the same university with me. I told her not to apply, to make it one person less, but it was more logical for her too, I mean to participate in Erasmus in the next year to transfer credits and find elective courses.

But I have seen worse! For example, 2 girls approached us when we were sitting in the cafeteria and asked me whether I was applying for Erasmus. I told them that I applied for Freie University. She tried to convince me that Freie was requiring German proficiency but I was sure that there was no such thing. I watched them for a while and they literally asked everyone, one by one, about their Erasmus applications.

Also, some people were lying about their preferences; I caught some lies. There was a girl who told me that she did not apply for Osnabrück but she was placed there when the results are announced. Everyone is trying to eliminate each other. Especially for Poland, there is a great competition; people never tell each other where they applied for in Poland. (Holly, woman, IR, 3rd year student, going to Germany)

Yeah, there is a lot of competition for Erasmus. I have some really strange friends who never told us where they applied. They kept it as a secret intentionally. People have started to manipulate each other about their preferences. I especially heard some people who told others “this university sucks, don’t go there”, but they eventually were placed in those universities.

¹² Game of Thrones is an American fantasy drama TV series produced by HBO. The production has attracted audience from all over the world and it is currently one of the most popular TV shows in Turkey. The show is renowned for its plot twists loaded with intrigue and drama.

There are a lot of people who want to go to Erasmus, but there are limited vacancies. So, people are trying to talk each other out of some places. For example, there was a girl who got selected and decided to withdraw her application afterward. People were really annoyed with her, she just wasted one vacancy. There was a tension in general in the classroom during the application period. (Stanley, male, ID, 2nd year student, going to Germany)

It can be argued that Holly's and Stanley's accounts about the competition among the students for Erasmus Program participation are one of the important nuances in this research. While this study is not a comparative one and does not allow any comparison with any other higher institutions in Turkey or in another program country, the competitive aspect of the program participation is still significant to show students' aspirations and determination. As it was discussed several times in this research, the Erasmus Program presents itself as a unique opportunity to students and the picture above shows us that determined students are willing to do whatever it takes to participate in the program. The participation in the program is associated with high rewards and self-fulfillment by many and there is a strong orientation and drive from the students to take their share of the available opportunity.

4.1.3.3 Expectations from the Participation and the Projection of Mobility Experience

The high rewards and the promise of self-fulfillment that the Erasmus Program participation offers to the students can be better conceptualized when the students' expectations from participating in the program and their projection of the future mobility are considered. As discussed previously, young individuals tend to embark on journeys which they believe they move towards a better self that is projected in the future when they question their self-identities as Desforges (2000) argues. Moreover, the survey also revealed that the vast majority of the participants consider Erasmus Program participation as a life-changing event. Thus, it is possible to argue that these aspirations in line with students' expected personal gains from the program, their academic orientations as higher education students and their projection of the Erasmus mobility experience should be evaluated.

4.1.3.3.1 Personal Expectations from the Erasmus Program Participation

The positive connotations that are attributed to the Erasmus Program participation by the informants had been one of the most dominant themes during the interviews. Applicants tend to evaluate the expected contributions of the Erasmus experience on many different levels, but it is possible to argue that these expectations become most evident when they speak of how spending a semester period abroad will significantly help them character wise. Most students tend to take this experience as a challenge, in which they will be able to test themselves in different contexts that are different from their local environments. Thus, participating in the program becomes an attempt for self-fulfillment for some students.

To illustrate, Pam and Jan explained how they expect that they will emerge as more self-confident and capable individuals after their periods abroad when they asked about the possible contributions of Erasmus Program participation on their personalities;

I consider it as the self-confidence. Even now, living away from my parents in Ankara contributes something to me. I am 19 and I lived in Denizli with my parents until now. Ok, you somehow develop yourself in your environment but the idea of living in another country by yourself feels as it will contribute a lot to me. I was never alone, there were always people to help me but now I will be going to somewhere alone for the first time. It will be better for me to handle things by myself. (Pam, woman, ELT, 1st year student, going to Spain)

I think my Erasmus experience will enhance my self-confidence. I am not really a self-confident person. Also, I will deal with a lot of bureaucratic stuff, maybe I can overcome my fear of official procedures. Also, my English is a bit problematic. I always start in English when I begin to speak in the classes but I continue and finish in Turkish. It won't be like this in there, my language skills will improve hopefully. Also, I know a little bit of German from high school, I hope that I improve my German as well. I am hoping that my adaptation skills will also increase. (Jan, woman, PSY, 2nd year student, going to Austria)

Jim, on the other hand, mentioned his parents' cultural background and the environment he was raised in. He clearly considers this personal background as “setback” and he wants to “move further” with his Erasmus experience.

I was born and raised in Ankara, my father is from Yozgat and my mother is from Rize; a brilliant combination! I was raised within a Central Anatolian culture. I would like to break this in myself, to be honest. I would like to be more open-minded and respectful towards all opinions.

I set myself a challenge; I will go there early September and come back early March, and I would like to be able to clearly see the difference between the Jim who went there and the one that came back. I want to feel that difference in a concrete way. (Jim, male, STAT, 4th year student, going to Germany)

According to Findlay et al. (2005), international student mobility looks to be “driven by a diversity of intentions rooted in past experiences and also linked to a colorful tapestry of imagined future benefits”. What the informants put forward so far seems to support this claims especially in terms of the imagination that is involved in this process. For students who do not have a significant previous mobility experience, Erasmus experience is a big unknown which is intertwined with complex expectations.

4.1.3.3.2 Academic Benefits

Baláz and Williams (2004) argue that Erasmus Program participants tend to value the cultural and linguistic aspects of their experience more than academic and professional benefits. In this study, it was revealed that the most students are expecting academic contribution from their participation in the long run, rather than with immediate effects. As revealed in the analysis of the survey data, the vast majority of the Erasmus Program applicants at METU prefer continuing their education at the graduate level. Participating in the Erasmus Program also becomes a part of this plan in many cases.

Karen noted that she would be utilizing her Erasmus mobility to establish herself in the country that she wishes to move for her PhD degree;

My actual goal about Erasmus is to go there and establish connections first and make the PhD applications afterward. I want to make my way for PhD, I mean. I don't have to travel a lot. Italy is a good place for my subject; it will be a nice experience. It would be really great if there will be an opportunity for me to continue later. (Karen, woman, ARCH, Master's level student, going to Italy)

Oscar, on the other hand, is one of the few applicants who are welcoming the academic prospects of their Erasmus Program participation. As quoted before, he will be spending his study abroad period in the UK which he believes will be a highly beneficial experience for him in academic terms as he also has reservations about his academic satisfaction at METU;

Sure, there is an academic part of it. You go there and see that the courses are a bit different. You go into a different system of education. A chapter's subject in one of our classes here may be an entire course by itself in their systems. They are more updated, to be honest; I am going to puke if I continue reading about the Cold War anymore here at METU!

It will be a different tradition as well; I am thinking that this will contribute to me. In terms of the social environment and people, the academic relationships, business world and inter-personal relations, it will be really different too. (Oscar, male, IR, 3rd year student, going to the UK)

Finally, according to Darryl, academic benefit from Erasmus Program is a privilege that not every participant may experience. He believes that the quality of the host institutions plays an important role in the academic experience;

It may offer something academically to a limited group of people as not everyone is able to visit really good schools. So, I don't think that everyone benefits from Erasmus in an academic way. It is hard to foresee it, how it will be academically, maybe some people benefit from it. But I have never seen that actually. (Darryl, male, PADM, 3rd year student, going to Poland)

Although most of the informants tended to acknowledge the academic aspect of their overall Erasmus experience, their focus quickly turned to the more cultural and

touristic aspects of their mobility when the interview followed by the questions on how they intend to spend their time abroad.

4.1.3.3.3 Projection of the Forthcoming Mobility Experience

During the interviews, participants focus significantly shifted towards their travel plans when they asked to give an overview of their study abroad period. The participants' emphasis on traveling was also presented in the survey data as the overwhelming majority of the students stated that they have plans to visit cities and countries in Europe other than the ones that they will be residing during their exchange period. The themes naturally emerged during the interviews, again, resonates with one of the initial claims that were made in this research in terms of the significance of mobility and students' deprivation of it in Turkey, in this case.

To illustrate, Andy and Holly explained that they deem it as a must to travel certain places during their exchange period;

Definitely, but definitely, I will visit Scandinavia. This is for sure. One of my primary goals is to come back here with no regrets. That is why I will make the most of the opportunities that will come across to me, in a sensible way. (Andy, male, ELT, 1st year student, going to Germany)

I already started making lists, to see this part of that city etc. There are places that I wouldn't come back to Turkey without seeing them, like Paris and Amsterdam. My plans are more on traveling. (Holly, woman, IR, 3rd year student, going to Germany)

Jan and Jim, on the other hand, talked about their intended general experience in addition to travel plans. They stressed that they would prefer to blend in with the locals rather than keeping in touch with the Turkish population in their destinations;

I will probably draw myself a travel route for the countries that I will visit. At least for the weekends, I want to visit new places while I am there. I would go to the neighboring countries. Also, I would like to get to know the locals living there. I don't want to limit myself to a Turkish environment and I don't want to go there and turn back only as a Turk. (Jan, woman, PSY, 2nd year student, going to Austria)

I will try to stay away from Turkish people as much as possible. This is something important to me. I will try to communicate in German rather than English. I will also try to travel as much as possible, first in Germany than outside. But my priority is to cover Germany entirely first.

I have never been to Europe. In fact, I have never been abroad. I need to utilize the 6 months there in the best way possible. (Jim, male, STAT, 4th year student, going to Germany)

Participating in the Erasmus Program opens the doors to Europe for students who otherwise would not have been able to have such experience. In other words, students are longing for mobility at the periphery of Europe and they are fulfilling their aspirations through the opportunity presented by the Erasmus Program.

4.1.3.4 Family's Involvement

Families' support for Erasmus Program participation of their children has been previously illustrated in this study with the survey data as the vast majority of participants stated that their parents strongly supporting their attempts to participate in the Erasmus Program. Drawing on from Esping-Andersen (1990) model of welfare regimes, Lüküslü (2016) argues that Turkey's welfare regime is considered to be Mediterranean where the family plays an important role in terms of providing social and financial support to individuals.

It is possible to argue that the family's involvement in the decision-making process of their children and the financial and emotional support they are providing throughout the exchange period is one of the most distinct findings of this study. Although there are examples of families' direct involvement in their children's international student mobility processes especially in Asian families in the case of the mobility of full-time, degree seeking international students as Ong (1999) argues, it seems that the case in Turkey is unmatched in the literature on Erasmus Program participation in terms of the level of involvement from the parents, or extended family members in some cases.

Thus, the priority for this section of the thesis is to provide as many examples as possible from different informants to illustrate the multi-faceted involvement of their families in the Erasmus Program participation process, starting from the initial application to the financial management of the family's economic resources during the study abroad period. This approach would make the case-specific determinants of this study more visible and highlight the unique practices that are taking place in Turkey in regard to the Erasmus phenomenon.

One of the recurring themes during the interviews was the interviewees' description of their parents' response to their participation in the program. Several participants referred to their parents' excitement and happiness by opting for the same expression; "the sparkling in their eyes". Moreover, students also repeatedly mentioned the unconditional support they receive from their families. The parents' sharing of their children's Erasmus news with the others such as colleagues at the workplace, the neighbors or the extended family members was also pretty evident for students during the interviews.

To illustrate, Dwight remarked how his parents were very excited about his participation by noting that "their eyes are sparkling",

My parents are really excited about this. Normally, it would have been my father that is the most excited one but this time he is relatively calmer.

Their eyes are sparkling, my mother's, father's, grandmother's. I told my grandmother maybe 6 or 7 times that I will be going to Greece but she still thinks that I am going to Italy! (Dwight, male, PADM, 3rd year student, going to Greece)

Oscar, on the other hand, talked about the support that he is receiving from his parents and that they are prepared to provide extra financial support for the sake of his education. The assurance he gets from his parents enabled him to make his destination selections in line with his priorities;

They are always supporting me anyway, but in an occasion like this, they are supporting me all the way down. There is also a financial aspect for sure; I was a bit hesitant at the beginning whether we could afford it or not and I considered cheaper options. Then my father told me that, “it is for education, just go for it. We will cover it somehow, it is ok”. After this, I made my application in my preference ranking. (Oscar, male, IR, 3rd year student, going to the UK)

Andy, again with a reference to the excitement of the parents, expressed how supportive his parents have been about his participation in the Erasmus Program. Moreover, he also noted that his participation became possible with the sale of their apartment, although the apartment was not directly sold to fund Andy’s Erasmus mobility, as his father assured him that they will be using the money coming from this sale to cover the costs of his participation.

They have been more supportive than me, they want me to go more than I want for myself and support me all the way down. They have been always like this. My mother is pretty excited. I saw when she was sharing the news with her friends and the neighbors. I can see the sparkle in their eyes.

We had an apartment that was sold recently. With the money coming from there, my father told me to participate in the program and told me that he is totally supporting me. I wouldn’t have been able to participate if that place wasn’t sold. I already started saving money or else I may have needed to sell one of my kidneys! (Andy, male, ELT, 1st year student, going to Germany)

For Holly, her participation became financially possible with a bit of negotiation with her parents. Although she noted that her participation is considered as a success by her parents and how her father shares the news with his colleagues at his workplace, she had to convince her father to use their economic resources not to purchase an apartment but to fund her educational activities. In turn, her parents decided to take a loan from bank to be paid upon her father’s retirement to cover the costs of her study period abroad;

My mom was thinking that Erasmus going to be strictly academic. But now, I am slowly telling her that I will be traveling and she also sees it from one of my friends who is currently on Erasmus how she travels and has fun a lot. She doesn’t like it and she is telling me that they aren’t giving me money just for travel. But I know that they like the idea of me going to Erasmus, especially my father. He considers it as a success. They told me how my father is telling everyone at work about his daughter is going to Germany.

My father is going to retire from his job in February. He tells me that we can now take a loan from the bank and pay the loan back once he is retired. He was actually planning to buy a house, but I talked him out of it. I went home to discuss my participation and told him that I would be able to go abroad neither for Erasmus nor for Master's degree if we bought that house. He told me that he would send me for both as I am going to a good country as in Germany. (Holly, woman, IR, 3rd year student, going to Germany)

Jim's case was one of the most interesting stories among all the informants that were interviewed. As a 4th-year student, he decided to intentionally drop his remaining courses and prolong his undergraduate study for a year to be able to participate in the program. He previously mentioned that he made this decision after developing an interest in the German automotive sector and he had long term plans to be employed by one of the German firms and moving to Germany if possible. Thus, he made only one preference in his application.

In addition to his parents' highly supportive approach, his story also includes the elements of support from his extended family members as it seems that his relatives lending their support to his parents as a collective unit to ensure his Erasmus Program participation;

I immediately called my father when the results were announced. Our relationship with my mother is more discreet but we are like friends with my father. I told him; "Dad, I am going to Germany, but we have a problem. I will have to prolong my graduation for a year". He told me to hang up and called me after few minutes. He said; "I didn't get this, aren't you going to graduate?" I told him, I will but one year later because of Erasmus. He, then, told me to leave all my courses and go to Erasmus. He said "Is there any better opportunity than this? Sure, you should go. We would cover everything. You are learning German and you have goals". My mother was more emotional at first but she accepted it afterward.

There is a great support behind me now. They are more excited than me at the moment. They are preparing themselves both in emotional and financial ways for my Erasmus period. They are telling the relatives and neighbors that I will be going to Germany. They are really excited; I can see it in their eyes.

Our extended family is really a close-knitted bunch. My father has 5 siblings and all of them told my father that they can arrange financial support if necessary for my

Erasmus. My extended family makes gatherings¹³ among themselves each month and they offered my mother to give us the turn for July and August as the money collected from them can be used before my departure. (Jim, male, STAT, 4th year student, going to Germany)

Meredith who only shared her intentions to participate in the program after the application results were announced also noted that the support coming from her extended family;

They did not know that I applied in the beginning but they liked the idea along the way. They considered it as a success and they are supporting my participation. Even my grandmother is supporting, normally she wouldn't want me anywhere far away. The relatives are constantly calling to congratulate me.

My parents will support me financially; my grandmother and aunt also told me that they can send-out support for me. (Meredith, woman, CRP, 3rd year student, going to Portugal)

Interestingly, Jan was the only candidate whose parents were not openly promoting her Erasmus Program participation. She was still unsure whether she will have the permission of her parents to participate in the program at the time of the interview, which was a unique element to this study as she was the one candidate that his or her mobility is subjected to the parent's submission. It is also important to note that she was also the only informant who hinted about a conservative family background in terms of lifestyle and politics;

I did not tell them about it when I was making my application, I love doing things without them knowing! I told them after I submit my application but I wasn't really hopeful about getting selected. Once I got selected, my father was more supportive but my mother was opposing my Erasmus period. But I feel like my father can also change his mind anytime soon. There is a chance that they may don't allow me to go there. The family is an important factor at the moment.

My parents are from Konya and they are from a conservative environment. I spoke to them when I went to Konya and I am resisting at the moment. I really don't know how I ended up like this coming from those circles.

¹³ These gatherings Jim mentioned are called "Gün" meetings in Turkish. "Gün" is a reciprocal agreement among a group of women who periodically meet on a regular basis, usually once in a month at each other's apartments, to give that month's host gold coins or money. "Gün" meetings also include socializing with fellow women as they are usually held among friends, neighbors and relatives. In a cyclical rotation, each participant of the "gün" meetings gets her share when it is her turn to be host.

The host university doesn't guarantee accommodation. They are concerned about this part. Also, they hear about the prejudice towards Muslims in Europe. And this thing on my head (pointing out her headscarf), it leads to prejudice everywhere with anyone. You are subjected to lots of generalizations.

They even did not let me come to Ankara by myself to take my papers for university registration. They are not the kind of people who would let traveling around a lot. They also consider Erasmus as such. And being a girl is one thing in itself...

I want to save some money for my Erasmus by working but my father doesn't let me work. (Jan, woman, PSY, 2nd year student, going to Austria)

Although it would be an overgeneralization if strict conclusions are drawn from Jan's case as she was the only informant coming from a conservative background, it is still a significant example in terms of how Erasmus Program is understood by different groups in Turkish society. While the sample of this study is mainly consist of parents who are strongly supporting their children's participation in Erasmus Program, it is also possible to argue that there are also social circles in Turkey who would not celebrate the program as the parents that are mentioned during the interviews¹⁴.

In conclusion, it is possible to argue that students' parents are playing an important role in their Erasmus Program participation. The family offers both economic and emotional support which assures students to embark on a journey abroad. As discussed previously, this study revealed that general socio-economic profile of Erasmus Program participants at METU corresponds to the middle-class background. Thus, as Vincent and Ball (2006) argue middle-class parents tend to take part in their children decision making processes so as to make sure that they are "equipping the child with the social and educational resources deemed necessary by families within

¹⁴ To illustrate, one of the prominent columnists in the conservative media, Yusuf Kaplan, who is also known by his close relationship with the ruling party AKP, published a controversial piece as a response to the news that 1 million babies have been born as a result of the relationships established by Erasmus Program (Independent, 2014). He claimed that some of the European students refer to the program as "Orgasmus" rather than calling it Erasmus and that "Erasmus Program is not an educational program, but it is a program that promotes degeneration, worshipping of sexuality and raising a group of idiots who only run after sex". He also argued that the birth of 1 million "illegitimate babies" is a disgrace (Yusuf Kaplan, in Yeni Şafak, 2014).

particular social groups” (p. 167). The findings also confirm this general attitude by the parents and show that how big of an investment that the Erasmus Program participation becomes both for students and for their parents in Turkey.

4.1.3.5 The Baggage Carried from Turkey

The survey data revealed that the general attitude towards Erasmus experience from METU students tends to be very positive, determined and self-confident. However, it was only the participation in the program from Turkey presented itself somewhat as a concern among students. This concern expressed by the participants became very evident during the interviews. Informants were open and highly emotional when they were talking about the features related the fact that they will be participating in the Erasmus Program from Turkey. One of the important attempts of this study is to contextualize the demand and drive to participate in Erasmus Program in Turkey in the domestic political context. While not being the only determinant, this study argues that Turkey’s recent social and political environment plays an important role in terms of encouraging students to participate in the Erasmus Program.

As mentioned previously, Turkey has gone through a rapid and dramatic transformation in social and political terms in the recent years. Starting from the Gezi Park protests in 2013, the generation that this study attempts to cover their Erasmus experiences, witnessed very closely how the country they were born in changed and the public space shrunk for them. In the last couple of years, these students experienced the elections that slowly formed authoritarian governments, frequent terror attacks in Ankara and all over the country, a failed coup attempt, and a referendum for the regime change that will result in the new presidential system in 2019.

On the other hand, Lüküslü (2016) also argues that since 2011, there has been an attempt by the ruling party AKP and state actors to introduce a new youth myth in Turkey as a pious one. From this perspective, she notes;

Anyone that does not fit into this ideal youth – in the case of the AKP’s youth project, those who engage in ‘immoral’ social behaviour, such as consuming alcohol or flirting in public, or ‘inappropriate’ political behaviour, such as taking part in protests – can easily be stigmatized as a threat to the larger political project of building a ‘New Turkey’. (2016, p. 3)

From this perspective, participants have been asked to comment about their feelings about going to Europe as Turkish citizens and whether the recent political developments in the country had any influence on their decision to participate in the program. Moreover, another theme occurred during the interviews in regard to experiences of the women participants as they strongly emphasized their feelings of insecurity in Turkey. Thus, it is possible to argue that a gender dimension has been added to this study in terms of Erasmus Program participation.

As covered in the previous section of this study where the families’ involvement in the overall Erasmus process had been discussed, it can be argued that the influence of domestic political context in which the drivers of mobility emerge within, is a phenomenon unique to Turkey and unmatched in the literature on Erasmus Program participation. Therefore, rather than attempting to make over-generalized explanations, the priority in this part of the study is to reflect on the students’ experiences and emotions, and to provide a picture of the general mood among the participants by presenting as many cases as possible.

To start with, Oscar notes that he expects to face prejudices due to Turkey’s recent image in the world. Furthermore, he also thinks that his national background may create problems for his host environment and he even shows empathy towards the possible reactions he may get;

It would create problems for them. For sure, our profile as a country is at an all-time low. Maybe 20 years ago, we could have said that Turkey was a part of Europe but now it is a part of Middle East. They may think like this. They may belittle your personal merits and potential or the country that you are coming from. When I look objectively; they may literally shut you up just about anything.

Especially when we consider the recent political events, you became a part of it as a citizen of the country, regardless of your stance towards it. If I get subjected to such kind of criticism, there not much I can do besides agreeing with them.

The personal prejudices would diminish as people get to know each other; it is not that big of a problem. But, for the prejudice towards Turkey, we are not in a position to somehow fix that. (Oscar, male, IR, 3rd year student, going to the UK)

Like Oscar, Toby also justifies the possible prejudices towards his nationality during his time abroad;

I actually don't know if they are aware of what is actually happening in Turkey, but I would have prejudices if I were in their place. The things happening here encouraged me to go, yes. I feel like the educated people are valued more in Europe. The living standards also look to be higher than Turkey. I just want to go there and experience it. Maybe it is not that good, then I would come back to Turkey. (Toby, male, CE, 2nd year student, going to Poland)

Andy, who previously noted that he had many international friends due to living in one of the touristic regions in the country prior to coming to METU, believes that his personal stance in regard to the political context in Turkey would affect others' perception of him during his Erasmus mobility. Moreover, he also argued that the current state of Turkey had a direct effect on his decision to participate in the program;

There is something I noticed with my foreign friends; they judge you in terms of your stance to the events in Turkey. When you express your point of view, they evaluate you accordingly.

My urge to leave Turkey gets stronger day by day with. I want to escape abroad with each thing that is happening here. It is a bit ironic in fact, I was born and raised here but it is also important what you understand from the word "homeland". But I know for a fact that I will leave Turkey someday because the country does not promise me the things that I want. (Andy, male, ELT, 1st year student, going to Germany)

For Phyllis, although there is a possibility of a prejudice towards her nationality, she believes that her personality will help her to overcome them as she also prepares herself to be more open-minded and respectful towards others;

Maybe at the beginning, but everyone has a different understanding of things. I think that they would like me. The prejudices about the country would diminish later, if there would be any.

I will personally try to be more open-minded. There were things, for example, that I was surprised with when first started the university but I got used to them. I will be respectful to everyone. (Phyllis, woman, ELT, , 1st year student, going to Italy)

Moreover, when asked whether she thinks that there will be difference between being a young woman in Turkey and being a young woman in her destination, Phyllis also noted how she expects to be more secure and comfortable during her mobility by giving the example of not being able to go to Kızılay¹⁵ without having any problems;

I think there will be a difference; I definitely think that there will be a difference. Italy is mostly known by its being relax. At the most basic level, I don't think that I will have any problems or concerns when going out at nights. Here, there are even problems when we go to Kızılay, there are lots of different kinds of people. I don't think that I will have problems there. (Phyllis, woman, ELT, 1st year student, going to Italy)

In fact, Phyllis was not the only participant who expressed concerns about going to Kızılay. Louise also used the same example when asked to compare her experience as a young woman in Turkey to her possible experiences in her destination;

I really don't want to say that it will be different, but yes it will definitely be different. The general point of view is very different first of all. I am hoping that the things we are trying to overcome here have already been destroyed there. It would be disappointing otherwise. I am thinking that some things would be more relaxed, comfortable. Although we are more isolated at METU, you get uncomfortable when you go the Kızılay with the same clothes on like when you go to METU. (Louise, woman, ID, 2nd year student, going to Italy)

¹⁵ Kızılay is the public square at the Ankara city center where residents in Ankara usually meet up and socialize in the numerous bars and cafes around. It is also the location where several terror attacks took place in the recent years.

Jim, on the other hand, considers the possible prejudices about his national background as the most significant setback about his exchange period and tells how he prepares himself for such instances;

Yes, this is actually the only depressing thing for me. Like I said, coming from the east, you get labeled with the label of Islam. I am thinking that I may suffer from it at the beginning but I can overcome it in the long run. I get the feeling that I will be held accountable for all the things that are happening in Turkey. I am expecting such things and preparing myself. I will try to keep calm and respectful. (Jim, male, STAT, 4th year student, going to Germany)

From a different perspective, Darryl mentions the METU student who was attacked and hospitalized during his exchange period in Poland during the spring semester of the 2016-2017 academic year. Still, he notes that doesn't such things too seriously and says that he may use his Bulgarian identity (as he also holds a Bulgarian passport) to avoid tension;

I really don't think that I will have serious problems, but I am more or less certain that I will come across with such things. A friend of mine who went to Poland last year got seriously beaten. There is a wave of rising racism in Europe but I don't think we can generalize it to whole Europe. It is obvious that I will face those things but I don't think that it will be really serious.

I think I may just avoid these kinds of things by saying that I am a Bulgarian citizen. Besides, there is always the chance for proper communication channels. I wouldn't be bothered with it all if there is no way for proper communication. (Darryl, male, PADM, 3rd year student, going to Italy)

For Holly, the recent terror attacks in Ankara had a direct effect on her decision to take a semester abroad. The availability of the Erasmus Program was her way out of Turkey and from her state of mind at that time;

It really affected my decision. I was thinking to change my school when the explosions were happening. I have anxiety disorder and safety is really important to me. I never go to Kızılay anymore for example.

I stopped going to classes after the explosions last year. I didn't leave my dormitory room at all. One of my professors e-mailed me as she was worried that I stopped going to her class. I went to see her and told her about how I felt at that time, how I was worried and afraid. And she told me that I can go abroad for Master's or PhD degree for a long time to move away from Turkey. But I was still very afraid and didn't know

how to spend my remaining years in my undergraduate study. Then she suggested me to participate in Erasmus to just get relaxed and relieved. Even the idea of going there makes me more comfortable at the moment. (Holly, woman, IR, 3rd year student, going to Germany)

Moreover, like Phyllis and Louise, Holly also mentioned that she expects a different social setting and experience as a woman in her destination. Her concerns about Turkey also resonate with other women informants in terms of giving the example of her experiences in the public space except for METU campus;

There will be a difference, for sure. Here, for example, I was going out of campus to the city center the other day and I wanted to wear a dress. But then I changed my mind because I was going to be alone outside the campus and take a taxi and all. I did not feel comfortable. This is the reality of Turkey, unfortunately. But when think about there, I don't get this feeling, I am not afraid. Going back to my room at night there, around 4 A.M, I don't feel like I feel insecure there. (Holly, woman, IR, 3rd year student, going to Germany)

Stanley, when asked about whether the recent political context influenced his decision to participate in the Erasmus Program, explained how he was devastated by the coup attempt in July 2016 and the aftermath of the referendum for the presidential system in April 2017. Moreover, he also noted that he was not feeling safe anymore in Turkey and he wishes to break away from the country by spending a semester abroad;

It influenced my decision, it really influenced a lot. The coup attempt and the referendum and all... I am full of it now, I turned against the country. I told myself that I want to go away. The psychological state in Turkey, I just can't go out anymore because of the fear. Neither the people nor the environment is to be trusted anymore, there is always something happening. I don't feel safe now. That's why I wanted to go abroad for a year and get relieved. I feel like I will get nuts here. Especially after the military coup, I was here in Ankara, my psychology just got destroyed. I was devastated for real. After the referendum as well, lots of things happened and we got demoralized again. There is always the mood that I need to go away from Turkey which encourages me to participate in Erasmus. (Stanley, male, ID, 2nd year student, going to Germany)

To sum up, participants in this study seem to carry a heavy burden on their shoulders in terms of their experiences as young individuals in a somewhat politically unstable Turkey. For women participants, as they noted, this burden appears to be doubled

especially with the insecurity they feel in the public space. It is possible to argue that the Erasmus Program becomes even more attractive for students who seem to have lost their faith in Turkey and look for a better future elsewhere. Thus, along with the other prospects attributed to the program such as career opportunities, the value of being mobile, constructing biographies and cultural experiences, the domestic political context in Turkey overlap with these premises and becomes an important drive for mobility.

4.1.3.6 Long Term Migration Plans

Most of the literature on international student mobility (see Teichler and Janson 2007, Parey and Waldinger 2011, Wiers-Jensen 2007) argues that having the experience to study abroad significantly increases the future migration behavior. Although the participants are still at the pre-mobility phase, the survey data showed us that the overwhelming majority of the Erasmus Program applicants at METU have plans to move abroad after they finish their studies at METU. Most of them intend to take post-graduate studies in higher education institutions abroad and become student migrants as this was evident in the survey and repeatedly expressed during the interviews. It is also possible to argue that, as it is in the case of initial attempt to participate in the Erasmus Program, the migration aspirations of the students is driven by “the hope for a better present or future elsewhere” (Papatsiba 2005; p. 3).

In this case, it seems that students consider their participation in the Erasmus Program somewhat as an initiator or mediator for their future migration plans. To illustrate, Andy explains that his Erasmus mobility will be the first step towards his gradual emigration;

If I imagine correctly, my journey to abroad will start with education and continue with a residence permit. Then I will receive citizenship. Erasmus will be the thing that will start all these. If I can establish myself with the professors there well, I will do my post-graduate studies anyway. These will give 5-6 years to live there. Why would I turn back to Turkey then? Erasmus will be the first step. (Andy, male, ELT, 1st year student, going to Germany)

On the other hand, Creed, a graduate student who is already in the job market, told his part of the story as his case was a pretty distinct one among all informants. He was entirely focused on the job prospects that his Erasmus mobility offers. This year, it was his second application to benefit from the program. In his first attempt, he was placed to Spain to spend a semester abroad. As an employee in the IT sector, he made job applications at the Spanish firms before he went there. He attended job interviews once he arrived in Spain. However, the position and salary he was offered did not satisfy him and he returned to Turkey. Meanwhile, he re-applied for the Erasmus Program and this time and had been placed to a German university.

Below, he explains his detailed plan to use the Erasmus Program framework to facilitate his entrance to Germany and to be granted a work permit;

I went to Murcia this February, but I returned back one month after that. I was thinking maybe I could write my thesis there. With PhD after that, I would have avoided military service. The state of the country urged me to run away to abroad. But I returned back as it did not satisfy me.

I re-applied again this year and have been placed to Essen (Germany). There are some criteria, like marriage, residence and employment. If those work out this year, I will go there. If we get married, we will go together. If I honestly confess it, I only consider Erasmus for the work permit. First, I will go there make the necessary arrangements. I tried this in Spain but it did not work out, it did not give me the price-performance satisfaction.

For Spain, I made the job applications first and took interviews. Since I am dealing with software, there is usually an international environment in the sector. I applied Erasmus for the work permit as I mentioned. They just give it in Spain. It is part time in Germany. (Creed, male, CENG, Master's level, going to Germany)

Learning from his experience in Spain, this time he is determined to make sure that he finds a job prior to going to Germany. Moreover, he also noted that going to Germany within the framework of Erasmus Program gives him assurances and chance benefit from his host institution's facilities such as having buddy student;

I want to go there for job opportunities. Now, I will go there if I can find a job in Essen. Also, when you go there with Erasmus, the university assigns you a host/buddy student. It is like they are giving you the tutorial for that city and country. I can also ask for help from the international office there in case of any problems. I feel like I have found the bug for Erasmus by doing like this. Erasmus gives you a sense of security when going there. (Creed, male, CENG, Master's level, going to Germany)

Despite coming from different perspectives and motivations, both Andy and Creed's accounts show us that participating in the Erasmus Program could be used for a source for emigrational capital in the long run. According to Brooks and Everett (2008), some students tend to make long-term plans for life-course management and it is usually possible to locate international mobility in these individual plans. Considering the discontent with the domestic political context and loss of faith in their future in the country, Erasmus Program participation becomes an attempt for many students who are willing to mobilize various forms of capital and resources to ensure themselves a better future.

In conclusion, interviews revealed the strong recognition and awareness of the students regarding Erasmus Program. There is a general opinion which is overwhelmingly positive. Moreover, most of the students already know about the program prior to higher education while some of them decided to participate in it during the high school years. In addition, the public opinion and the positive interpretation of the program also showed us how students' perspectives have also shaped by the others' Erasmus experiences.

On the other hand, the context that the decision to participate in Erasmus Program also seems to differ as there are both dedicated and well-planned applications as opposed to more arbitrary and incidental decisions to participate in the program. Still, it is shown in the interviews that students value Erasmus experience highly and the decision-making process revolves getting this experience rather than focusing strictly on specific destinations in most of the cases.

Regarding the expectations from participation and the projection of forthcoming mobility, it is possible to argue that all of the students are highly optimistic and they believe that they will benefit from their Erasmus Program participation significantly. There is a strong emphasis on cultural exchanges and traveling during the mobility period while some participants also more focused in academic and professional terms.

One of the most significant findings of this study was to highlight the family's involvement in the general Erasmus experience of students. The emotional and financial support that the parents, and extended family in some cases, had been evident throughout the interviews. It is also possible to argue that Erasmus Program participation requires careful planning in economic terms as many of the interviewees mentioned the extra resources that are intended to be utilized for students' mobility period. Thus, it can be argued that the findings on the families' involvement in the Erasmus experience and decision-making process present one of the case-specific practices that are unique to Turkey when we consider the literature on Erasmus Program.

Moreover, it is also found out that the domestic political context in Turkey had a direct effect on many students' decision to participate in the program. Most of the interviewees expressed their discontent and concerns about the social and political environment in the country and that they intend to use the program to break away from Turkey. Furthermore, a pattern also emerged in terms of women participants' remarks as it has been shown that their concerns are doubled as young women in the public space.

Finally, interviews also revealed that participating in Erasmus Program is a part of long-term migration aspirations for many students. From this perspective, applicants consider their experience abroad as an initiation to a wider scene of international opportunities.

This chapter covered the empirical findings that have been elaborated within the framework of this study. After focusing on the key socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the applicant cohort of 2017 application period at METU revealed by the conducted survey, the discussion is followed by the analysis of the interview data in terms of students' overall pre-mobility experiences and their expectations and motivations regarding the Erasmus Program participation. The aim of this chapter was to first define the sample of this study and cover students' expectations to participate in the program and build on the scope that was created by the survey data with the in-depth interviews. Interviews have been utilized to reflect on students' perspectives and interpretation of Erasmus phenomenon.

The next and the final chapter will cover the summary of the findings of this research. Moreover, the strengths and weaknesses and the reflection on future studies on this topic will also be included in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to reflect on the motivations and expectations of higher education students in Turkey to participate in Erasmus Program in the case of METU by focusing on the pre-mobility phase of participants. One of the significant attempts made in this study was also to provide key characteristics of Erasmus Program applicants at METU in demographic, socio-economic and departmental terms, which is an overlooked topic in Turkey, although there has been a steady rise in terms of demand and participation in the program throughout its implementation in the country. After providing the theoretical base and definitions of the key concepts, this study was built on the empirical findings which stem from the data collected through a comprehensive online survey and in-depth interviews. In addition to focusing on motivations and expectations of Erasmus Program applicants, the aim was also to reflect on the social and personal interpretation of the Erasmus experience by the students as well as relocating the students' perspectives of Erasmus Program participation in the social and political context in Turkey.

From this perspective, the first chapter focused on my reflexive experience as a former Erasmus Program participant and “Mobility Specialist” at METU. As discussed previously, this aspect is considered as an important dimension of this research as I claim to have located myself to Abbott's (2007) understanding of lyrical sociology as a researcher in which the author's personal and emotional stance as well as his or her engagement towards the object of study plays an important role. That is why, the priority in this study was to go beyond the quantitative data and contextualize the research in this specific time and place to highlight the case-specific and unique elements of the Erasmus phenomenon in Turkey.

The second chapter of this study covered the contextualization of research in terms of its venue and a brief overview of domestic political context in Turkey was presented. The institutional structure at METU and the operation of exchange schemes were explained. Moreover, an overview of the available exchange programs at METU was provided to illustrate the context that Erasmus Program, among other exchange schemes, stands out as the most popular and in-demand framework for students. It is important to note that the institutional aspect of the international student mobility is a significant aspect in terms of providing support and incentive to students to participate. From this perspective, the research venue in this case should not be overlooked, as METU, both as an institution and a social setting creates its own context in terms of students' perspectives and experiences. To illustrate, as Lanzendorf and Kehm (2010) argue, language is still an important barrier for international student exchanges. Considering the overall foreign language proficiency in Turkey, even among higher education students, METU students are in a privileged status as they are highly proficient in the English language due to the language of instruction of the institution being English. Moreover, there is a strong institutional orientation towards internationalization and students are encouraged to have international experiences. On the other hand, as a campus university, the daily life at METU is isolated from rest of the city and the public space. As some of the women interviewees remarked, there is a significant difference in terms the experience in and outside of the campus for students. Furthermore, the survey data also revealed that participants believe that they will not have any significant problems in terms of adaptation to another culture and being a METU student will have benefits for them during their exchange period. That is to say, the values and the cultural codes that are embraced by METU cannot be generalized to Turkey, especially in terms of openness towards international experiences.

In the third chapter, the research problem is explained in detail. The research design, methodology and the definition of key concepts are also provided. The terminological differentiation is made in regard to mobility-migration nexus and the use of the term "mobility" was justified.

The international student mobility phenomenon is discussed in line with the themes of mobility, biography, the influence of socio-economic background, the previous mobility experience and future migration plans, push-pull factors and career prospects in regard to Erasmus Program participation of individuals. The discussions on the themes mentioned above are important as the research and the field throughout this research has been shaped around those. However, at this point, it is important to turn back to the initial research questions asked within the framework of this study in light of the empirical findings that are presented in the fourth chapter of this study.

To start with, the following questions were asked at the start of this study;

- 1) Who participates (or attempts to participate) in Erasmus Program at METU in terms of demographic, socio-economic and departmental profiles of the applicants?
- 2) What are the motivations and expectations of the students who attempt to participate in Erasmus Program?
- 3) How do students conceptualize their forthcoming Erasmus mobility? What is the social and personal interpretation of this experience?
- 4) Does the recent domestic political context in Turkey have any considerable influence on the students' decision to participate in Erasmus Program?

In regard to the first question, it is revealed that Erasmus Program applicants at METU are from middle-class backgrounds, with parents who had access to higher education. Moreover, it is possible to observe a strong urban background as the vast majority of the participants had been living in one of the three biggest cities in Turkey, İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir, prior to their enrollment in METU. On the other hand, a pattern emerged in terms of the departmental profiles of the participants. It is shown that Erasmus Program participants at METU are mainly coming from Humanities, Education and Architecture fields while the participation from

Engineering fields is considerably low. Moreover, most applications are made by the students who are in their 2nd and 3rd years in their studies. Finally, women students show more interest in Erasmus Program than their male counterparts do. As discussed previously, while it is possible to argue that the top participant provider departments to Erasmus Program are mainly populated by women students, the analysis of the interviews also revealed that some women participants are feeling highly insecure in the public space in Turkey and they believe that a more comfortable environment awaits them at their destinations. This is an important nuance which shouldn't be overlooked by solely focusing on the numerical data in terms of the gender distribution of the applicants.

As a response to the second question, it is possible to argue that there are different motivations and expectations at play for students to participate in Erasmus Program. As Ballatore and Ferede (2013, p. 525) argue, "Like many study-abroad schemes, Erasmus is grounded on the premise that meaningful educational activity in a foreign country facilitates leadership, language, inter-cultural awareness and adaptability skills". The findings showed that while participants' motivations and expectations overlap with the general discourse on Erasmus Program's prospects in terms of language, cultural exchanges and career development, it is possible to argue that there is also highly personal and individualized meaning attributed to Erasmus Program participation by the students. For students, this presents itself as taking the challenge that their forthcoming Erasmus mobility offers as they believe that they will test themselves in a foreign and unknown environment away from their local social settings.

Concerning the third question, this study showed that students value their Erasmus mobility very highly and they consider it as a life-changing experience. There is a strong optimism revolving around their forthcoming mobility and they receive a strong support from their families. As discussed previously, many students' have no or little previous international mobility experience and Erasmus Program becomes one of the very few opportunities that students may take in this context. That is why

most of the applicants plan to make the most of their participation in the program and prepare themselves for new experiences.

In regard to the fourth question, the analysis of the interviews illustrated the direct reference that most of the participants gave to Turkey's domestic political context. Most of the informants were discontent and feeling overwhelmed by the recent political environment in the country. As Carlson (2011) argues, this feature showed that their mobility is driven not only by the favorable determinants such as cultural interaction, language development or career goals but also driven by the negative circumstances which led them to draw symbolic boundaries. According to Lamont and Molnar (2002, p. 168), symbolic boundaries are "conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space". In this case, participants expressed their feelings of apathy and insecurity in terms of the domestic political context and repeatedly remarked that they are expecting prejudice towards them during their Erasmus mobility due to their national backgrounds. However, many informants during the interviews stated that they expect to be exempted from the prejudices once they express and introduce themselves. This shows us that rather than identifying themselves with their home country, participants' orientation is towards the host culture where they move away from Turkey's domestic political context.

The fourth chapter covered the empirical analysis of the data that had been gathered within the scope of this research. The first of the chapter focused on the survey data to define the sample of this research and to elaborate on the key characteristics of the Erasmus applicants at METU. The survey data is utilized to provide a structural analysis of the sample in this study. The second part of the chapter focused on the interview data gathered from the in-depth interviews that are used for a micro-level analysis to highlight the pre-mobility phase experiences of applicants.

The two-fold approach to the fieldwork in this research, the survey and interviews, made it possible to draw on from a highly representative data. The survey data provided the overall characteristics of the sample universe while the interviews made the way for focusing on students' experiences and case-specific features of this research. It is possible to argue that, except for previous mobility experience of the participants, the case of METU overlaps with what the existing literature on student mobility has produced so far. However, it was the interviews that revealed features which are specific to this study in terms of Erasmus Program participation of students. To illustrate, the findings showed that families invest in their children's Erasmus Program participation both in financial and emotional ways. In financial terms, extra economic resources are allocated for students' mobility period and parents even envisage taking bank loans or using the resources that are obtained by selling assets. On the other hand, in emotional terms, parents offer their unconditional support to their children and share the news of program participation with friends and the family. Moreover, as discussed previously, the direct influence of Turkey's political context on the decision to participate in the program and the competition among prospective Erasmus Program participants are also prominent findings of this study.

While this study put so much focus on family, it did not include any family members in its sample. Therefore, for future studies, the inclusion of family members would provide depth and value as it is shown in this research that family plays an important role in participants' Erasmus Program trajectories. Moreover, although this study's framework was limited with the pre-mobility phase, further research covering the full mobility cycle is required to draw comprehensive analysis in light with participants actual mobility experiences. Finally, a comparative study which includes several countries along with Turkey would be an important contribution to the existing literature on Erasmus Program to highlight case specific aspects that are shaped around this particular subject.

In conclusion, this study provided a comprehensive analysis of students' pre-mobility phase of Erasmus Program participation in the case of METU on different levels, starting from the institutional scene to the participants' experiences and the family's involvement. At this point, it is important to remember that Erasmus Program is a product of the EU's mindset to create a multi-cultural, proficient and politically aware population that embraces a European identity as King et al. (2010) argue. However, in Turkey's case, the program creates its own context and practices as illustrated throughout in this study. Most of the participants from Turkey will not likely to have the chance to be employed in another Member State or they will never get the chance to have freedom of movement within Europe. Still, there is a strong orientation from students to be a part of this experience. That is why, in a year when Erasmus Program celebrates its 30th anniversary, it is important both for policy-makers and social scientists to not to overlook the celebration that comes from participants in Turkey.

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APPENDICES

A. SURVEY QUESTIONS



ODTÜ Öğrencilerinin Erasmus Değişim Programı'na Katılım Kararını Belirleyen Etkenlerin Anlaşılması

Değerli katılımcı,
Bu çalışma üniversitemiz bünyesinde değişim programlarını yürüten Uluslararası İşbirliği Ofisi tarafından Erasmus Programı uygulamalarının geliştirilmesi için düzenlenmektedir. Sizden en fazla 5 dakika süren anket çalışmasına katılmanızı rica ediyoruz. Anket kapsamında derlenecek tüm veriler anonim olarak ve bilimsel çalışmalarda kullanılacaktır.
Katılımınız için teşekkür ederiz.

* Doğum tarihiniz?

Bişim: dd.mm.yyyy

* Cinsiyetiniz?

Kadın Erkek

* Bölümünüz?
Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

* Sınıfınız?
Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

- 1
 2
 3
 4
 Yüksek lisans
 Doktora

* Ortalamanız?

Bu alana yalnız sayılar yazılabilir.

* Üniversite öncesi hangi ilde ikamet ediyordunuz?

? (Yaşanılan ilin adı)

* Üniversite öncesi hangi yerleşim biriminde ikamet ediyordunuz?
Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

- Metropol merkez (İstanbul - Ankara - İzmir)
- Büyükşehir merkez (250 bin - 1 milyon nüfuslu)
- Orta veya küçük büyüklükte şehir merkezi (50 bin - 250 bin)
- İlçe
- Kasaba/Köy

* Annenizin eğitim düzeyi?
Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

- Okulsuz
- İlkokul
- Ortaokul
- Lise
- Önlisans
- Üniversite
- Yüksek lisans
- Doktora

? En son tamamlanan öğrenim seviyesi

* Babanızın eğitim düzeyi?
Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

- Okulsuz
- İlkokul
- Ortaokul
- Lise
- Önlisans
- Üniversite
- Yüksek lisans
- Doktora

? En son tamamlanan öğrenim seviyesi

* Annenizin mesleği?
Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

- Çalışmıyor
- İşçi
- Memur (orta düzey, öğretmen-kamu dairelerinde çalışan vb)
- Memur (profesyonel, uzman, üst düzey yönetici)

- Kendi hesabına profesyonel (kendi hesabına çalışan doktor, avukat, mühendis, mimar vb)
- Küçük işveren (1-10 kişi çalıştıran)
- Orta ve büyük işveren (10 kişiden fazla çalıştıran)
- Kendi hesabına küçük ticaret
- Kendi hesabına büyük ticaret
- Emekli (şu anda başka bir işte çalışmakta olan)
- Emekli (şu anda çalışmayan)

*** Babanızın mesleği?**

Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

- Çalışmıyor
- İşçi
- Memur (orta düzey, öğretmen-kamu dairelerinde çalışan vb)
- Memur (profesyonel, uzman, üst düzey yönetici)
- Kendi hesabına profesyonel (kendi hesabına çalışan doktor, avukat, mühendis, mimar vb)
- Küçük işveren (1-10 kişi çalıştıran)
- Orta ve büyük işveren (10 kişiden fazla çalıştıran)
- Kendi hesabına küçük ticaret
- Kendi hesabına büyük ticaret
- Emekli (şu anda başka bir işte çalışmakta olan)
- Emekli (şu anda çalışmayan)

Herhangi bir kaynaktan burs alıyor musunuz? Eğer burs alıyorsanız lütfen aylık miktarı belirtiniz

Uyanların tümünü seçiniz.

Burs alıyorum

Burs almıyorum

? Lütfen aldığınız aylık burs miktarını açıklama kısmında belirtiniz

*** Aylık geliriniz ne kadar?**

Bu alana yalnız sayılar yazılabilir.

? Ailenizin aylık gönderdiği miktar ve ek olarak çalışıyorsanız aylık kazandığınız ücret toplamı

*** Ailenizin aylık toplam geliri ne kadar?**

Bu alana yalnız sayılar yazılabilir.

? Anne ve babanızın toplam kazancı, kira ve gayri menkul gelirleri dahil olmak üzere

*** Kaç kardeşiniz var?**

Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

- Kardeşim yok
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4 ve üzeri

* Yüksek öğrenim hayatına devam etmekte olan kardeşiniz var mı?

Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

- Kardeşim yok
- Evet
- Hayır

* Erasmus Programını ilk ne zaman duydunuz?

Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

- Üniversiteye başlamadan önce
- Üniversiteye başladıktan sonra hazırlık sınıfında
- Üniversiteye başladıktan sonra bölümde

* Erasmus Programını ilk hangi kaynaktan duydunuz?

Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

- Aile
- Arkadaş
- Lise-dershane rehber öğretmen
- Üniversite duyuruları
- Bölüm Erasmus Koordinatörü
- Öğrenci toplulukları
- Diğer

* Daha önce yurtdışında bulundunuz mu? Eğer daha önce yurtdışında bulduysanız, ne kadar süreliğine?

Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

- Daha önce yurtdışında bulunmadım
- 1 - 2 hafta
- 2 hafta - 1 ay
- 1 - 3 ay
- 3 - 6 ay
- 6 ay - 1 yıl
- 1 yıl ve üzeri

? Lütfen daha önce yurtdışında geçirmiş olduğunuz toplam süreyi belirtiniz

* Daha önce yurtdışında bulduysanız, hangi ülkelerde bulundunuz?

Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

- Daha önce yurtdışında bulunmadım
- Daha önce yurtdışında bulundum

Lütfen açıklamanızı buraya yazınız.:

? Eğer daha önce yurtdışında bulduysanız, bu ülkelerden en fazla 5 tanesini açıklama kısmında belirtiniz

*** Daha önce yurtdışına çıktıysanız, ne amaçla çıktınız? Uyanların tümünü seçiniz.**

- Daha önce yurtdışında bulunmadım
- Aile tatili
- Bireysel turistik geziler
- Okul gezileri
- Dil eğitimi
- Gönüllü çalışma kampları
- Staj faaliyetleri
- Aileden kaynaklı uzun süreli ikamet
- Diğer:

*** Aile çevrenizde (aile dostu, komşu, akraba vb) Erasmus programından faydalanan tanıdığınız var mı? Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz**

- Bahsedilen çevrede Erasmus Programından faydalanan bir tanıdığım yok
- Aile (Kardeş)
- Geniş aile (Kuzen-akraba vb)
- Aile dostu (Ebeveyn arkadaş çocuğu vb)
- Komşu
- Diğer:

*** Çevrenizde Erasmus deneyimine sahip aşağıdaki kişilerden kimse var mı ve Erasmus kararına etkisi oldu mu?**

	Çok önemli	Önemli	Fikrini aldım ama önemli değildi	Önemli değil	Hiç önemli değil	Böyle bir tanıdığım olmadı
Çekirdek Aile (Kardeş)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Geniş Aile (Akraba - Kuzen)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Aile Çevresi (Ebeveyn Arkadaş Çocuğu)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Aile Çevresi (Komşu)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Erasmus Programına katılmış arkadaş	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Erasmus Programı ile Türkiye'ye gelen arkadaş	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* Çekirdek aileniz içinde daha önce yurt dışında eğitim alan var mı?

- Evet Hayır

* Yurtdışında yaşayan akrabanız var mı?

Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

- Yurt dışında yaşayan akrabam yok
- Yurt dışında yaşayan akrabam var

Lütfen açıklamanızı buraya yazınız.:

? Yurtdışında yaşayan akrabanız varsa lütfen yaşadıkları ülkeleri açıklama kısmında belirtiniz

* Yurtdışında yaşayan akrabalarınızın Erasmus tercihinize bir etkisi oldu mu?

Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

- Evet
- Hayır
- Yurtdışında yaşayan akrabam yok

* Ailenizin Erasmus programına katılımınız hakkında görüşleri neler?

Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

- Katılımı destekliyor
- Katılımı desteklemiyor
- Koşullu destekliyor (belirli bir ülke ya da okul olması halinde)
- Kararsız
- Bilgisi yok
- Diğer:

* Mezuniyet sonrası öncelikli planlarınız nedir?

Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

- Mezun olduktan sonra bir süre ne yapacağımı düşüneceğim
- Mezun olduktan sonra hemen işe başlamak isterim
- Mezun olduktan sonra yüksek lisans yapmak isterim
- Mezun olduktan sonra akademik kariyer amaçlı yüksek lisans-doktora yapmak isterim.
- Diğer:

* Üniversite mezuniyetinden sonra yurtdışında yaşama planlarınız var mı?

Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

- Henüz düşünmedim
- Yurtdışı planım yok
- Eğitim (yüksek lisans-doktora)
- İş tecrübesi kazanmak için bir süre

Kalıcı yerleşim

Diğer:

Erasmus Programından beklentilerinizi temel ve basit kavramlarla kısaca anlatabilir misiniz?

? Eğlence, kariyer, değişiklik, özgürlük, yeni insanlar, macera vb. gibi

*** Erasmus başvurunuzda hangi ülkeleri tercih ettiniz?**

	Ülke adı
Tercih 1	<input type="text"/>
Tercih 2	<input type="text"/>
Tercih 3	<input type="text"/>
Tercih 4	<input type="text"/>

Bu tercihiniz belirleyen temel etkenler nedir? Lütfen kısaca anlatınız.

*** Erasmus programına başvuru sürecinizde aşağıdaki hangileriyle ilgili araştırma yaptınız?
Uyanların tümünü seçiniz.**

- Gidilecek üniversite
- Gidilecek ülke
- Gidilecek şehir
- Konaklama olanakları
- Kültürel etkinlikler-Sosyal hayat
- Turistik bölgelere yakınlığı
- Diğer:

*** Erasmus programına katılma konusunda faydalandığınız en önemli kaynak hangi(leri) oldu?**

	Çok önemli	Önemli	Böyle bir kaynak vardı ama kullanmadım	Önemli Değil	Hiç önemli değil	Böyle bir kaynağım yoktu
Erasmus programına katılmış arkadaş	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Erasmus programına katılmış tanıdık	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bölüm Erasmus koordinatörü	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Başka bir bölüm hocası	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Uluslararası Ofis	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Kendi araştırmalarım	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* Kısıtlayıcı hiçbir etken olmasaydı hangi ülkeyi tercih ederiniz?
Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

Seçmek için tıklayınız...

* Hibe çıkmaması halinde yine de Erasmus programından faydalanabilir misiniz?

Evet Hayır

* Erasmus kapsamında yurtdışında geçireceğiniz sürede kültür şoku yaşayacağınızı düşünüyor musunuz?
Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

- Kesinlikle evet
 Evet
 Emin değilim/Hiç düşünmedim
 Hayır
 Kesinlikle hayır

* Erasmus sürecinde dil kaynaklı bir sorun yaşayacağınızı düşünüyor musunuz?
Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

- Kesinlikle evet
 Evet
 Emin değilim/Hiç düşünmedim
 Hayır
 Kesinlikle hayır

* Erasmus sürecinde farklı mutfak kültürü nedeniyle bir sorun yaşayacağınızı düşünüyor musunuz?
Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

- Kesinlikle evet
 Evet
 Emin değilim/Hiç düşünmedim
 Hayır
 Kesinlikle hayır

* Erasmus sürecinde cinsiyetiniz/cinsel yöneliminiz nedeniyle bir sorun yaşayacağınızı düşünüyor musunuz?

Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

- Kesinlikle evet
- Evet
- Emin değilim/Hiç düşünmedim
- Hayır
- Kesinlikle hayır

* Erasmus Programına Türkiyeden katılıyor olmanız (uyruğunuz) kaynaklı bir sorun yaşayacağınızı düşünüyor musunuz?

Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

- Kesinlikle evet
- Evet
- Emin değilim/Hiç düşünmedim
- Hayır
- Kesinlikle hayır

* Erasmus Programına ODTÜden katılıyor olmanızın özel bir faydası olacağını düşünüyor musunuz?

Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

- Kesinlikle evet
- Evet
- Emin değilim/Hiç düşünmedim
- Hayır
- Kesinlikle hayır

* Erasmus sürecinde ekonomik güçlük/geçim sıkıntısı yaşayacağınızı düşünüyor musunuz?

Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

- Kesinlikle evet
- Evet
- Emin değilim/Hiç düşünmedim
- Hayır
- Kesinlikle hayır

* Erasmus tecrübesinin hayatınızı önemli ölçüde değiştireceğini düşünüyor musunuz?

Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

- Kesinlikle evet
- Evet
- Emin değilim/Hiç düşünmedim
- Hayır
- Kesinlikle hayır

* Erasmus sürecinin mesleki hayatınıza olumlu bir katkısı olacağını düşünüyor musunuz?

Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

- Kesinlikle evet
- Evet
- Emin değilim/Hiç düşünmedim
- Hayır
- Kesinlikle hayır

• Erasmus Programı sürerken aynı ülkedeki başka bir şehri ziyaret etmeyi düşünüyor musunuz?

Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

- Kesinlikle evet
- Evet
- Emin değilim/Hiç düşünmedim
- Hayır
- Kesinlikle hayır

• Erasmus Programı sürerken başka bir ülkeyi ziyaret etmeyi düşünüyor musunuz?

Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

- Kesinlikle evet
- Evet
- Emin değilim/Hiç düşünmedim
- Hayır
- Kesinlikle hayır

• Erasmus sürecinde yeni bir dil öğrenmeyi düşünüyor musunuz?

Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

- Kesinlikle evet
- Evet
- Emin değilim/Hiç düşünmedim
- Hayır
- Kesinlikle hayır

• Erasmus Programına katılmış olmanın ileride yurtdışına göç etmek istemeniz halinde faydalı olacağını düşünüyor musunuz?

Aşağıdaki yanıtlardan birini seçiniz

- Kesinlikle evet
- Evet
- Emin değilim/Hiç düşünmedim
- Hayır
- Kesinlikle hayır

B. INTERVIEW TEMPLATE

Genel Demografik Bilgiler

- Yaş:
- Memleket:
- Cinsiyet:
- Bölüm:

Güzergâh:

- Hangi Ülke:
- Hangi şehir/üniversite:
- İlk tercih:
- Değilse ilk tercih olarak nereyi istiyordunuz:
- Neden ilk tercih olarak bu ülke/okul:

ERASMUS Haberdarlık:

- Sizce ERASMUS programı nedir? Hiç bilmeyen birine anlatmanız gerekirse nasıl anlatırsınız?
- ERASMUS programından ilk haberdar olma:
 - (**Probe:** Üniversite Öncesi, Hazırlık, Bölüme geçtikten sonra):
- ERASMUS programından kim vasıtasıyla haberdar olma:
 - (**Probe:** Daha önce aileden katılmış bir yakın, dersane danışman, arkadaş çevresi, üniversite danışman hocası)
- ERASMUS programına katılmaya karar verdikten sonra ülke ve üniversite seçimini nasıl yaptınız?
 - (**Probe:** Daha önce giden gelenlere sorma, uluslararası ofise danışma, internetten bakma).

ERASMUS İzlenim:

- ERASMUS programına katılmış bir arkadaşınız oldu mu?
 - (**Probe:** Üniversite öncesi ilişkilerden, ODTÜ'den, yurttan, bölümden. Birden çok?).
- Onunla ERASMUS üzerine konuştunuz mu?
- Onun deneyimlerinden size kalan izlenim ne oldu?
- ERASMUS'a gidip gelmiş insanlarda gözlemlediğiniz genel bir durum var mı?

- (**Probe**: Burada gelecek anahtar sözcükleri açmaya çalışalım, ne demek istediniz, neyi kast ediyorsunuz gibi).

ERASMUS Amaç - Beklenti:

- ERASMUS programına katılmaya nasıl karar verdiniz?
- Bu kararınızda etkili olan etkenleri düşünürsek neler sıralayabilirsiniz?
- ERASMUS programı kapsamında oradayken yapmayı planladığınız şeyler var mı?
- ERASMUS programına katılımın size kişisel olarak ne katacağınızı düşünüyorsunuz?
- ERASMUS programına katılımının eğitiminiz açısından faydalı olacağını düşünüyor musunuz?
- ERASMUS programına katılımın mesleğiniz açısından faydalı olacağını düşünüyor musunuz?
- Aileniz ERASMUS programına katılım konusunda nasıl bir tutuma sahip?

ERASMUS Deneyim:

- Daha önce yurtdışında yaşama deneyiminiz var mı? (Var ise bahseder misiniz?)
- ERASMUS deneyimi konusunda kültür şoku yaşayacağınızı düşünüyor musunuz (özellikle ilk yurtdışı deneyimi ise).
- ERASMUS deneyimi konusunda Türkiye'den gidiyor olmanızın özel bir durum yaratacağını düşünüyor musunuz?
- Sizce herhangi bir güçlük yaşayacak mısınız? (Evet ise neler olabilir sizce?).

GÖÇ:

- Yurtdışına yerleşmek gibi bir düşünceniz var mı?
 - (**Probe**: Düşünce mi kesinlikle düşünülmüş bir mesele mi? Kısa, orta, temelli, eğitim ya da mesleki amaçlı).
- NEDEN? Bu konudan biraz bahseder misiniz?
- ERASMUS programına katılım sizce bu konuda size bir katkı sunacak mı?
- ERASMUS'u anlatmak için üç kelime kullanmanız gerekirse bunlar neler olurdu?

C. INFORMATION ABOUT INTERVIEWEES

Table C.1 General Characteristics of the Interviewees

Nickname	Gender	Age	Department	Level	Destination Country
Angela	W	19	ELT	1 st year	Italy
Pam	W	19	ELT	1 st year	Spain
Oscar	M	22	IR	3 rd year	UK
Andy	M	18	ELT	1 st year	Germany
Phyllis	W	20	ELT	1 st year	Italy
Louise	W	20	ID	2 nd year	Italy
Dwight	M	22	PADM	3 rd year	Greece
Jim	M	23	STATS	4 th year	Germany
Darryl	M	22	PADM	3 rd year	Poland
Meredith	W	23	CRP	3 rd year	Portugal
Jan	W	20	PSY	2 nd year	Austria
Creed	M	27	CENG	MS	Germany
Stanley	M	21	ID	2 nd year	Germany
Toby	M	21	CE	2 nd year	Poland
Erin	W	27	SOC	MS	Germany
Holly	W	22	IR	3 rd year	Germany
Karen	W	25	ARCH	MS	Italy
Ryan	M	30	SPL	MS	Germany
Nellie	W	24	ARCH	MS	Portugal

D. TURKISH SUMMARY

1999'da yapılan Helsinki Zirvesi'nden sonra Avrupa Birliđi'ne üye olmaya aday ülke statüsü kazanan Türkiye bu sayede Avrupa Birliđi'ne üye ve üye olmaya aday diđer ülkeler gibi Avrupa Birliđi'nin eğitim programlarına katılma hakkı kazanmıştır. Bu kapsamda 2003 yılında pilot uygulaması başlayan Erasmus Programı kısa sürede ülke bazında yükseköğrenim kurumlarından ciddi bir ilgi görmüş ve programa katılım Türkiye genelinde oldukça hızlı bir şekilde artmıştır. Örneđim programın pilot uygulamasının yapıldığı ilk yılda 15 yüksek öğrenim kurumundan 128 öğrenci projeye katılmıştır. Bugün ise Türkiye'de 100.000'i aşkın yüksek öğrenim öğrencisi, en az bir dönem yurtdışında eğitim görmek için Erasmus Programına katılmış ve kurumların Erasmus Programı'na katılmasını sağlayan ECHE (Yükseköğretim için Erasmus Beyannamesi) belgesine sahip üniversite sayısı, 2016 yılında 15'den 164'e yükselmiştir. Buna ek olarak, 2013-2014 öğretim yılında Türkiye, Erasmus Programı kapsamında İspanya, Almanya, Fransa ve İtalya'nın ardından en çok öğrenci gönderen beşinci ülke olmuştur. Ayrıca 2007-2008 öğretim yılındaki (Hayat boyu Öğrenme Programı'nın başlangıcı) katılımcı sayıları ile karşılaştırıldığında, Türkiye'den Erasmus Programı'na katılan öğrencilerin sayısı 2013-2014 akademik yılında göre% 112 artmıştır. Yukarıda bahsedilen rakamlar, Erasmus Programı'nın Türkiye'de ciddi bir talep gördüğünü ve yükseköğretim alanında kendine önemli bir yer edindiğini göstermektedir.

Bu kapsamda, bu çalışma, ODTÜ örneğinde Türkiye'deki yükseköğretim öğrencilerinin Erasmus Programı'na katılma konusundaki motivasyonları ve beklentilerini, katılımcıların hareketlilik öncesi aşamasına odaklanarak yansıtmayı amaçlamaktadır. Ayrıca bu araştırma ODTÜ'de programdan yararlanmak için başvuruda bulunan öğrencilerin demografik ve sosyo-ekonomik özellikleri açısından bir katılımcı profili resmi sunmayı hedeflemektedir. Bu çalışmanın bir diđer temel hedefi ise öğrencilerin Erasmus Programı'na katılımlarını Türkiye'nin sosyal ve politik gündemi ışığında tekrar yorumlamak ve aradaki olası ilişkiyi ortaya çıkarmaktır.

Bu noktada bu araştırmanın kapsamının ODTÜ ile sınırlı olduğunu belirtmek faydalı olacaktır. Zira, ODTÜ öğrenci profilinin sosyo-ekonomik, demografik ve politik anlamda homojen bir yapıya sahip olduğunu ve bu homojen yapının bu çalışmada elde edilen sonuçlar açısından oldukça belirleyici bir rol oynadığını tartışmak mümkündür. Bir diğer deyişle, Erasmus hareketliliği kısa bir süreyi kapsıyor ve yüksek bir geri dönüş ihtimali içeriyor olmasına rağmen, Erasmus Programı'nın ülkenin iç siyasi bağlamında bunalmış hisseden birçok öğrenci için "kaçış yolu" olarak kendisini gösterdiğini iddia etmek mümkündür.

Yukarıda bahsedilen çerçevede yola çıkılan bu çalışmada, ODTÜ örneğinde öğrencilerin Erasmus Programı'na katılma etkenleri üzerine odaklanılmış ve araştırma bazı temel eksenler üzerinde geliştirilmiştir. Bu noktada ilk hedef, ODTÜ'deki Erasmus Programına katılan ya da katılmaya teşebbüs eden öğrencilerin demografik, sosyo-ekonomik ve bölüm profillerini çıkarılmasıdır. Buna ek olarak, ikinci önemli eksen, bu öğrencilerin Erasmus Programı'na katılma motivasyonları ve beklentilerine odaklanmaktır. Üçüncü olarak, bir diğer temel amaç ise derinlemesine mülakatlar aracılığı ile öğrencilerin Erasmus hareketliliklerine yüklenen sosyal ve bireysel anlama odaklanıp Erasmus Programı'na katılımın kavramsallaştırılmasıdır. Son olarak, yukarıda da bahsedildiği üzere, öğrencilerin programa katılım motivasyonlarını Türkiye'de son dönemde yaşanan toplumsal ve politik gelişmeler ışığında yeniden yorumlanması bu çalışmanın diğer bir önemli hedefi olmuştur.

Bu bağlamda, bu çalışma çerçevesinde ODTÜ öğrencilerinin Erasmus Programı'na katılım etkenlerinin analizini yapmak için kapsamlı bir araştırma yapılmıştır. Çalışmada nicel ve nitel araştırma yöntemlerinin bir kombinasyonu kullanılmıştır. ODTÜ'de 2017 başvuru döneminde Erasmus Programı'na başvuran öğrenci grubunun sosyo-ekonomik, demografik ve bölüm özelliklerini tanımlamak için nicel araştırma teknikleri kullanılmıştır. Nitel araştırma yöntemleri ise öğrencilerin kişisel beklentilerinin yorumlanmasında ve analizde derinlemesine mülakatlar yoluyla uygulanmıştır.

Bu açıdan, bu tezdeki saha çalışması iki bölümden oluşmaktadır. Öncelikle ODTÜ'de 2017 başvuru döneminde programa başvuru yapan tüm öğrencilere çevrimiçi bir anket uygulanmıştır. Bu anket internet üzerinden gerçekleştirilen Erasmus Programı başvuru sistemine entegre edilmiş ve başvuru yapan 1107 öğrenciden 415'i ankete katılmıştır. Diğer bir deyişle, anket çalışmasına %37'lik bir katılım oranı sağlanmıştır.

Başvuru dönemi sonunda 529 öğrenciler ODTÜ Uluslararası İşbirliği Ofisi tarafından başarılı olarak duyurulmuştur. Başarılı öğrenciler programdan faydalanmak için 2017-2018 akademik yılı güz ve bahar dönemleri arasında tercih yapmış ve bunun sonunda 257 programa güz döneminde katılmaya karar verirken 272 öğrenci Erasmus Programı'ndan bahar döneminde faydalanmayı seçmiştir. Bu noktada derinlemesine mülakat örnekleme için takvimsel ve pratik nedenlerle bir seçim yapılmış ve örneklem sadece programdan 2017-2018 akademik yılı güz döneminde faydalanacak öğrencilerle sınırlandırılmıştır. Zira programdan güz döneminde yararlanacak öğrenciler 2016-2017 akademik yılı bahar döneminde programa katılmak adına evrak toplama, vize alma ve gitmeye hak kazandıkları okula başvurma gibi süreçlere başlamışken, programdan bahar döneminde yararlanacak öğrenciler benzeri hazırlıklara 2017-2018 güz döneminde başlayacaklardır. Bu noktada derinlemesine mülakatlara 19 öğrenci katılmış ve bu öğrenciler örneklemin cinsiyet, bölüm ve öğrenim seviyesi gibi özellikleri göz önünde bulundurularak seçilmiştir. Görüşmelere katılan 19 öğrenciden 12'si kendilerine elektronik posta yolu ile gönderilen davetiye sonucunda çalışmaya katılmaya gönüllü olurken, kalan 7 öğrenci ise kartopu örnekleme kullanılarak çalışmaya davet edilmiştir.

Bu noktada, Erasmus Programı ile ilgili bir çalışmaya başlamadan önce Avrupa Birliği'nin eğitim politikalarının tarihsel arka planı ve genel bir resmine odaklanmak uygun olacaktır. Zira, Erasmus Programı ciddi bir birikim sonucu Avrupa Birliği tarafından uygulanmaya başlanmıştır. Bu birikimin Avrupa Birliği'nin eğitim politikaları ile ilgili genel yaklaşımını ve bu politikalara yüklediği anlamı yansıttığını

tartışmak mümkündür. Bu çerçevede, Avrupa Birliği tarihindeki eğitimle ilgili ilk girişimleri 1957 Roma Anlaşması'ndaki yükseköğretime dair söylemlere kadar takip etmek mümkündür. Fakat bununla birlikte, eğitim konusunun Avrupa Birliği içindeki karar verici mekanizmalar tarafından ulusal eğilimleri ve egemenliği yansıtmamasından dolayı uzun süre görmezden gelindiğini tartışmak mümkündür. Bu noktada Batory ve Lindstorm (2011), vergi ve göç politikaları ile birlikte, Avrupa Birliği'nin pek çok düzeyde Avrupa entegrasyonuna yönelik iddialı girişimlerine rağmen, eğitimin ulusal egemenliğin son alanlarından biri olarak değerlendirildiğini iddia etmektedir. Ancak, özellikle 1970'li yıllardan sonra Avrupa'da gençler arasındaki istihdam oranının düşmesi ile birlikte daha kapsamlı ve doğrudan eğitim politikaları Avrupa Birliğince uygulanmaya başlanmış ve bu eğitim programları, genç nesiller arasında Avrupalı kimliğinin yaygınlaştırılması da amacıyla, etkin bir şekilde kullanılmaya başlanmıştır. Zira öğrenim süreleri boyunca başka bir ülkeyi tecrübe eden Avrupalı öğrencilerin diğer Avrupalılarla etkileşime girerek kültürler arası bir tecrübe yaşayacakları ve bununda ortak bir Avrupa toplumu hissiyatı ortaya çıkarılmasında etkili olacağı düşünülmüştür. Dolayısıyla, Avrupa Birliği'nin, özellikle öğrenci hareketliliğini genç nesiller arasında Avrupalı kimliğini teşvik etmek için önemli bir araç olarak gördüğünü iddia etmek mümkündür. Ancak, Avrupa Birliği'nin eğitim politikaları içinde 1999 yılında yapılan Bologna Deklarasyonu'nun ayrı ve çok önemli bir yer tuttuğunu iddia etmek yanlış olmayacaktır. Teichler'in (2015) de dediği gibi, Bologna Deklarasyonu ortak kredi sistemi, diploma ekleri ve kalite yönetimi gibi konulardaki güçlü iş birliği aracılığı ile Avrupa'da eğitim anlamında önemli bir yapısal değişikliğe yol açmış ve Avrupa çapında ortak bir zemin oluşmasını mümkün kılmıştır. Bu noktada, Erasmus Programı'nın kurumsallaşması ve ciddi bir destek görmesi de Bologna Deklarasyonu ile mümkün olmuştur.

Bugün, Erasmus Programı'nın dünyadaki en ünlü öğrenci değişim programlarından biri olduğunu iddia etmek yanlış olmayacaktır. 2014 yılında uygulanmaya başlanan Erasmus+ Programı bugün Avrupa Birliği tarafından yönetilen tüm eğitim programları için şemsiye adıdır. Bu programların yönetimi oldukça karmaşık ve kapsamlı bir bürokratik çerçevede olmakla beraber, kısaca bahsedilecek olursa, bu

çalışmanın kapsamı Erasmus + Ana Eylem 1 Bireylerin Öğrenme Hareketliliği altındaki Eğitim ve Gençlik Alanındaki Hareketlilik Projeleri'nden olan Program Ülkeleri Arasında Yükseköğretim Öğrenci ve Personel Hareketliliği projesidir (KA103). Erasmus KA103 Programı kapsamında katılımcılar en az 3 ve en fazla 12 ay olmak üzere, bir program ülkesinde değişim hareketliliğinden faydalanmaktadır. Ancak, pratik sebeplerden dolayı bu çalışmada bu programdan sadece Erasmus olarak bahsedilmektedir.

ODTÜ özelinde ise, öğrencilerin Erasmus Programı'na katılımlarını daha iyi anlamak adına katılımcıların içinde buldukları kurumsal çerçeveyi ve değişim programlarının ODTÜ'de nasıl yönetildiğini ortaya koymak gerekmektedir. Zira, ilgili literatürde de sıkça tartışıldığı üzere, kurumsal yaklaşım uluslararası öğrenci hareketliliklerini etkileyen önemli faktörlerden biridir. ODTÜ'deki değişim programları Rektörlüğe bağlı Uluslararası İşbirliği Ofisi'nce (UİO) yönetilmektedir. UİO her yıl, güz döneminin bitmesiyle birlikte, genellikle Şubat ayı başında bir sonraki akademik yıl için Erasmus Programı başvuru dönemini başlatır. Temel İngilizce Bölümü (hazırlık) ve Bilimsel Hazırlık programlarında kayıtlı olan öğrenciler dışında tüm ODTÜ öğrencileri, lisans seviyesi için 2.50, lisansüstü seviyesi içinse 3.00 genel not ortalamasına sahip olmak kaydıyla, Erasmus Programı'na başvurma hakkına sahiplerdir. Başvuru döneminde öğrencilerin 4 tercih yapma hakları vardır. Başvuru dönemi sona erdikten sonra, başvuru yapan öğrencileri ODTÜ Temel İngilizce Bölümü tarafından hazırlanan İngilizce yeterlik sınavına girerler. Bu noktadan sonra Uluslararası İşbirliği Ofisi, öğrencilerin genel ortalamaları ve İngilizce yeterlilik sınavından aldıkları sonuçları göz önünde bulundurarak başvuruları değerlendirir ve nihai sonuçları ilan eder.

ODTÜ'de 2017 Eylül ayı itibariyle hali hazırda 4 uluslararası öğrenci değişim programı bulunmaktadır. Bunlar sırasıyla Yurtdışı Değişim Programı (Overseas Exchange Program), Mevlana Programı ve Erasmus+ çatısı altındaki KA103 Program Ülkeleri ve KA107 Ortak Ülkeler değişim programlarıdır.

Kurumdaki en eski deęişim programı Yurtdışı Deęişim Programı'dır. Bu program genel olarak ODTÜ'nün ABD, Kanada, Avustralya, İsrail, Japonya, Güney Kore, Singapur ve Tayvan gibi ülkelerdeki yükseköğretim kurumlarını kapsamaktadır ve Haziran 2017 itibariyle ODTÜ'nün 115 Yurtdışı Deęişim Programı anlaşması vardır. Bu program kapsamında öğrenciler herhangi bir maddi destek almamakta, sadece gitmeyi hak kazandıkları okullarda öğrenci katkı payı ya da öğrenim harcı ücreti ödememektedirler. Dolayısıyla bu programdan çok fazla sayıda öğrenci faydalanamamakta, faydalanan öğrenciler ise genel olarak ekonomik olarak avantajlı arka planlardan gelmektedirler. Ayrıca programın maddi destek sağlamamasından dolayı öğrenciler zaman zaman vize sorunları yaşayabilmektedirler.

ODTÜ'nün parçası olduđu bir diđer deęişim programı ise Mevlana Programı'dır. Program, adını kendi döneminde hoşgörü ve sevgiyi vurgulayan, 13. Yüzyılda yaşamış şair ve Sufi Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi'den almaktadır. 2011 yılında uygulamaya geçen Mevlana Programı, Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu (YÖK) tarafından yönetilmektedir. Program Erasmus Programı'nın kapsamındaki Avrupa ülkeleri hariç tüm dünyadan yükseköğretim kurumlarını kapsamaktadır (YÖK, 2014). ODTÜ, 2013-2014 akademik yılında Mevlana Deęişim Programı'na katılmıştır ve Haziran 2017 itibariyle 45 Mevlana Deęişim Programı anlaşmasına sahiptir. Bu anlaşmaların bir çođu Yurtdışı Deęişim Programı anlaşmalarıyla örtüşürken, kalan partner kurumlar ise komşu Asya, Orta Dođu ve Balkanlar gibi bölgelerde yer alan yükseköğretim kurumlarıdır. Ancak yukarıda anlatılan Yurtdışı Deęişim Programı'nda olduđu gibi, Mevlana Programı'na katılan öğrencilerin sayısı çok yüksek değildir ve YÖK tarafından uygulanan bazı kısıtlamalar dolayısıyla programdan faydalanmaya hak kazanan öğrencilerin süreç ilerledikçe katılım haklarından vazgeçmeleri sıklıkla gözlemlenmiştir.

Son olarak, Erasmus Programı'na odaklanacak olursak, ODTÜ 2003 yılında Türkiye'deki pilot uygulama yılından itibaren Türkiye'deki Erasmus Programı ađının bir parçası olmuştur. Program, mevcut kurumsal ve finansal destek ile birlikte Avrupa'da bir yükseköğretim kurumunda eğitim hareketliliğini kapsamısından

dolayı ODTÜ’de en çok talep gören ve katılım sağlanan uluslararası değişim programı olmuş ve değişim programları anlamında temel çerçeveyi oluşturmuştur. Daha önce de bahsedildiği üzere, öğrenciler Erasmus Programı çerçevesinde Avrupa'daki program ülkelerinden birinde belirli bir öğrenim süresi geçirmek hakkını sahiptirler. Program ülkeleri terimi, Avrupa Komisyonu tarafından Avrupa Birliği'nin 28 üye ülkesine ve AB'ye üye olmayan Makedonya, İzlanda, Lihtenştayn, Norveç ve Türkiye'ye atıfta bulunmak için kullanılmaktadır. Program ülkeleri Avrupa Komisyonu tarafından hayat pahalılıklarına göre 3 kategoriye ayrılmıştır. Bu 3 kategoriye göre öğrenciler aylık 300, 400 ve 500 Avro miktarında hibeler almaktadırlar. ODTÜ, Erasmus Programı yapılanmasını etkili bir biçimde kullanmış ve gerek gelen öğrenci, gerekse de giden öğrenci anlamında kapsamlı bir ağ oluşturmuştur. Haziran 2017 itibariyle ODTÜ’nün 32 program ülkesinin 29’una yayılan 321 Erasmus Programı anlaşması bulunmaktadır. Erasmus Programı ODTÜ’de uygulanmaya başladığı ilk yıldan bugüne öğrenciler tarafından ciddi bir talep görmüş ve programa yüksek sayıda bir katılım sağlanmıştır. Bu açıdan, Erasmus Programı’nın, yurtdışında bir dönem geçirmek isteyen ODTÜ öğrencileri için en popüler ve etkili fırsat olduğunu tartışmak mümkündür.

Bu noktada, Erasmus çerçevesinde ODTÜ’de 2 değişim programı bulunduğunu hatırlatmak gerekmektedir. Yukarıda anlatılan program ülkelerini kapsayan Erasmus+ KA103 programına ek olarak, ODTÜ ayrıca Erasmus+ KA107 Ortak Ülkeler ile Hareketlilik Programı’nın da bir parçasıdır, KA107 Programı Avrupa Komisyonu tarafınca belirlenen Avrupa’daki program ülkeleri dışındaki dünyanın çeşitli yerlerindeki 84 ülkeyi kapsamaktadır. Program ODTÜ’de 2015 yılında uygulanmaya başlanmıştır. Program dahilindeki giden-gelen öğrenci dengesi göz önünde bulundurulduğunda gelen öğrenci hareketliliğin çok büyük oranda baskın olduğunu ve şu an itibariyle giden öğrenci sayıları anlamında ciddi bir alternatif sunmadığını söylemek mümkündür. Bu nedenle, Erasmus+ KA107 Programı bu çalışma kapsamında incelenmemiştir.

Yukarıda sunulan çerçeve ile birlikte, ilgili literatürden yola çıkarak öğrencilerin Erasmus Programı'na katılma kararlarını bazı temel sosyolojik eksenlerde tartışmak bu noktada uygun olacaktır. Bahsedilen temel eksenler bu çalışma kapsamında hareketlilik kavramı, kişisel biyografiler, katılımcıların sosyo-ekonomik durumları, uzun vadeli göç planları, itme-çekme kuramı, kariyer planlaması ve sosyal sermaye temaları etrafında geliştirilmiştir.

Bu noktada öncelikle hareketlilik ve göç terimlerini kavramsallaştırmak gerekmektedir. Bu iki terim arasında bulanık bir çizgi olduğunu tartışmak mümkün olsa da, hareketlilik terimini göçü de kapsayan genel bir kavram olarak kabul kullanmak daha uygun olacaktır. Erasmus hareketliliğinin belirli bir zaman aralığını (3-12 ay) ve katılımcıların geri dönüşünü kapsamamasından ötürü bu eylemi ilk adımda göç olarak tanımlamaktansa hareketlilik kavramı üzerine tartışmak ve Erasmus katılımını bu ekseninde yorumlamak faydalı olacaktır. Öte yandan, Erasmus Programı özelinde uluslararası öğrenci hareketliliğini gelecekteki olası göç davranışlarını ilk adımı olarak görmek de mümkündür. Fakat bu çalışma Erasmus Programı'na katılım öncesi aşamasına odaklandığından elde edilen bulguların fiili göç davranışından ziyade öğrencilerin göç isteklerine yönelik olacağını not etmek gerekmektedir.

Hannam, Sheller ve Urry'ye (2006) göre, hareketlilik kavramı 21. yüzyılda kendi yansımalarını ve bağlamalarını yaratan önemli ve tanımlayıcı kavramlardan biri haline gelmiştir. Öte yandan, Erasmus Programına katılma konusunda kişisel beklentilerin ve hedeflerin de önemli bir rol oynadığını tartışmak mümkündür. Programa katılım, öğrencilerin biyografilerini birey olarak zenginleştirme girişimi olarak değerlendirilebilir. Dolayısıyla, Erasmus Programına katılmanın, öğrencilerin kendilerini akranlarından ayırt etmeleri için bir ifade biçimi ve fırsatı olarak düşünülebileceğini iddia etmek mümkündür. Ancak, sadece hareketlilik ve kişisel biyografi kavramlarına odaklanmak, Erasmus Programı'na katılımı anlamak için yeterli olmayacaktır. Papatsiba'nın (2005) da dediği gibi hareketlilik kavramı olumlu yönleriyle birlikte var olan mevcut sosyo-ekonomik kısıtlamaları da yansıtmakta ve yansıtmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın ilerleyen kısımlarında sahada elde edilen bulguların

da göstereceği gibi, belirli bir dönem için yurtdışına çıkmak bir çok öğrenci için maddi açıdan oldukça zorlayıcı olabilecek bir eylemdir. Erasmus hareketliliğinde mevcut Erasmus fonlarıyla bile, yaşam masraflarını karşılamak için ekstra ekonomik kaynaklara ihtiyaç duyulması muhtemeldir. Özellikle Türkiye'nin para birimi olan Lira'nın Avro'ya ve diğer pek çok yabancı para karşısında değer kaybettiği bu dönemde Erasmus Programı'na katılım birçok öğrenci ve aile için ciddi bir yatırım anlamına gelmektedir. Bu nedenle, Erasmus Programına katılımı analiz ederken, öğrencilerin sosyo-ekonomik arka planlarının belirleyici bir etken olduğunu iddia etmek mümkündür. Ancak, sosyo-ekonomik etkenlerle birlikte Bourdieu'nun (1986) kültürel, sosyal ve sembolik sermaye kavramlarına odaklanmak da tartışmak açısından faydalı olacaktır. Bourdieu sermaye kavramını ekonomik anlayışın ötesine taşır ve bu kavramın kültürel, sosyal ve sembolik anlamda maddi olmayan yönlerine vurgu yapar. Bu noktada uluslararası öğrenci hareketliliği, farklı sermayenin ve sosyal özelemlerin bir araya geldiği önemli bir alan olduğunu tartışmak mümkündür. Özellikle orta sınıfların eğitimi araçsallaştırarak kültürel sermaye kurma eğiliminde olduğunu iddia etmek Bourdieu'nun de iddia ettiği üzere mümkündür. Bu anlamda uluslararası eğitim olanakları kültürel sermaye elde etmek için daha büyük bir cazibe haline gelmektedir. İtme - çekme faktörleri de uluslararası öğrenci hareketliliğini açıklamada kullanılan kavramlardan biridir. Bu model ağırlıklı olarak uluslararası tam zamanlı öğrencilere yönelik araştırmalarda kullanılmasına rağmen, Erasmus hareketliliği üzerine yapılan tartışmalarda da yararlı bir araç olabilir. Uluslararası öğrenci hareketliliği temelinde itme-çekme kuramı maliyet, siyasi bağlam, ve iş piyasası gibi yerel faktörleri itki olarak değerlendirirken, gidilecek ülkenin eğitim sistemini, kurumların prestijini ve coğrafi etkenleri çekim olarak değerlendirir. Öte yandan, Teichler'e göre (2004) öğrencilerin uzun vadeli kariyer planları da Erasmus Programı'na katılım konusunda önemli bir rol oynamaktadır. Bu anlamda programa katılımın bireyler tarafından iş piyasasında kullanacakları bir yatırım olarak değerlendirildiğini tartışmak mümkündür. Ancak, Erasmus Programı'na katılımı kariyer beklentileri üzerinden tartışırken bunun katılımcılar tarafından yüklenen bir anlam olduğunu ve var olan çalışmaların yıllar geçtikçe Erasmus Programı'na

katılımın iş piyasası üzerindeki etkisinin azaldığını gösterdiğini vurgulamakta fayda vardır.

Bu tez kapsamında yapılan saha çalışmasına dönecek olursak, 2017 başvuru döneminde çevrimiçi olarak uygulanan anketten elde edilen veriler, ODTÜ’de Erasmus Programı’na başvuran öğrencilerin temel demografik ve sosyo-ekonomik özelliklerini ve bu özelliklerle birlikte programa başvurma motivasyonlarını ortaya koymuştur. Bunun ötesinde, anket çalışmasından elde edilen veriler sayesinde ODTÜ örneklemini Erasmus üzerine yazılmış mevcut literatür ile de karşılaştırmak mümkün olmuştur. Anket bulgularını kısaca özetlemek gerekirse; ODTÜ örnekleminde Erasmus Programı ile sunulan fırsatı en iyi şekilde değerlendirme konusunda oldukça kararlı bir öğrenci grubu olduğu ortaya çıkmıştır. Özellikle bu öğrencilerin yükseköğrenim hayatlarının ilk yılından bu yana İngilizce eğitim görmeleri, kurumun uluslararasılaşmaya önem vermesi ve akademik kadronun öğrencileri uluslararası deneyimler konusunda cesaretlendirdiği düşünüldüğünde, ODTÜ öğrencilerinin Erasmus Programı konusundaki istekleri ve beklentilerinin güçlü olmasının nedenini anlamak mümkündür. Ayrıca anket verileri, Erasmus Programı’na katılım açısından ODTÜ’de homojen bir örneklem olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Programa başvuran öğrenci profili ağırlıklı olarak kadın, 2. ve 3. sınıf öğrencileri ve orta sınıf karakterine sahip öğrencilerinden oluşmaktadır. Ayrıca bu öğrencilerin ciddi bir şehirlilik geçmişi olduğu ortaya çıkmıştır. Zira başvuru yapan öğrencilerin çok ciddi bir kısmının yükseköğrenime başlamadan önce Türkiye’nin en büyük 3 şehir olan İstanbul, Ankara ve İzmir’de ikamet ettikleri ortaya çıkmıştır. Ailenin eğitimsel ve mesleki statüsüne gelindiğinde ise öğrenci anne ve babalarının büyük oranda üniversite mezunu olduğu ve devlet kademesinde çalıştıkları ya da emekli oldukları görülmüştür. Anket sonucunda elde edilen ailenin aylık gelir seviyesinin de 4.200 TL bandında olduğunu düşünürsek, bu öğrencilerin orta sınıf ailelerden geldiğini iddia etmek yanlış olmayacaktır. Anket çalışmasının bir diğer önemli bulgusu ise öğrencilerin uluslararası hareketlilik anlamında bir deneyim eksikliği görülmektedir. Başvuran öğrencilerin yarısından fazlası daha önce yurtdışında bulunmadıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Daha önce yurtdışında bulunmuş öğrencilere bu deneyimlerinin ne

kadar sürdüğü sorulduğunda ise kısa süreli (1 aya kadar) yurtdışı deneyimlerinin ağırlıkta olduğu görülmüştür.

Bu noktada, ODTÜ örneği Uluslararası öğrenci hareketliliği ve Erasmus Programı ile ilgili mevcut uluslararası, özellikle de Avrupa bazlı, literatürde çizilen genel çerçeve ile kıyaslandığında, bu çalışmadaki bulguların programa başvuranların sosyo-ekonomik durum, bölüm ve demografik profili, cinsiyet dağılımı ve genel motivasyonlar ve beklentiler açısından bahsedilen literatür ile bir örtüşme gösterdiği görülmüştür.

Ayrıca, mevcut Erasmus fonlarının oynadığı önemli rol de bu çalışmada ortaya çıkmıştır. Katılımcıların büyük çoğunluğunun yurtdışında eğitim gören ilk öğrenciler olacağını da belirtmek önemlidir. Öte yandan, tüm kurumsal teşvik ve desteğe rağmen, sosyal çevre, özellikle programa katılan akranlar, öğrencilerin program katılımı için en etkili kaynaklardan biri oldu. Kariyer beklentileri bakımından, başvuranların Erasmus katılımını çok önemsedikleri ve katılımlarının uzun vadede kendileri için çok faydalı olacağına inandıkları açıktır. Ekonomik faktörlere ek olarak, öğrenciler hareketlilik gençlik kültürünün bir parçası olarak yorumlanabilir yurtdışında dönemlerinde mobil olmak için uzun. Dahası, başvuranların çarpıcı bir kısmı kısa vadede ya da daimi ikamet için yurtdışına çıkmayı planlıyor ve Erasmus deneyiminin ileride yurtdışına çıkma peşinde fayda sağlayacağına inanıyorlar. Bununla birlikte, ODTÜ örneği, Erasmus Programı'na katılım öncesindeki uluslararası hareketlilik deneyimi açısından literatürdeki çalışmalardan farklılık göstermektedir. Bu çalışma Erasmus katılımının birçok öğrenci için ilk uluslararası hareketlilik deneyimi olacağını göstermektedir. Bununla birlikte, öğrencilerin mezuniyet sonrası planları göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, Erasmus deneyiminin, öğrenciler için uzun vadeli bir hareketlilik ya da göç tecrübesi için bir kapı araladığını iddia etmek mümkündür.

Bu tez kapsamında yapılan saha çalışmasının ikinci aşaması olan programa katılmaya hak kazanan 19 öğrenci ile yapılan derinlemesine mülakatlara gelindiğinde

ise öğrencilerin Erasmus Programı'na dair oldukça olumlu ve güçlü bir algısı olduğu görülmüştür. Bunun da ötesinde, programın tanınırlığı açısından, birçok öğrencinin yükseköğrenim hayatlarına başlamadan önce program hakkında bilgi sahibi oldukları ve hatta bir kısım öğrencinin Erasmus Programı'na katılmaya lise yıllarında karar verdikleri ve üniversite tercihleri yaparken tercih ettikleri okulların Erasmus Programı olanaklarına baktıkları ortaya çıkmıştır. Bununla birlikte, programa katılım kararının alınma aşamasında iki temel grubun ortaya çıktığını tartışmak mümkündür. Bu gruplardan ilki, yukarı da anlatıldığı üzere, oldukça kararlı ve planlı bir şekilde programa katılma kararı alıp hazırlıklarını ve gidecekleri okul/ülke tercihlerini uzun süre önceden yapmış öğrencilerdir. Bununla birlikte, daha keyfi ve anlık kararlar alıp Erasmus Programı'nın kültürel ve turistik yanına odaklanan öğrenciler de olmuştur. Yine de programa katılımdan beklentiler açısından ise anket verilerinden yola çıkarak öğrencilerde genel bir ortaklaşma olduğunu tartışmak mümkündür. Katılım beklentileri ve kendilerini bekleyen Erasmus hareketliliğinin yorumlanması ile ilgili olarak öğrencilerin çok büyük bir kısmının oldukça iyimser olduklarını ve programdan hayatlarını değiştirecek ölçüde faydalanacaklarına inandıklarını belirtmek mümkündür. Öğrencilerin özellikle hareketlilik dönemlerinde kültürel değişimlere kendilerini hazırladıkları ve gittikleri ülke ile Avrupa içerisinde seyahat yapma konusunda oldukça kararlı oldukları görülmüştür.

Bu çalışmanın en önemli bulgularından biri ise ailelerin öğrencilerin Erasmus Programı'na katılma sürecine yoğun ve doğrudan bir şekilde dahil olduklarını göstermek konusunda olmuştur. Ailelerin özellikle duygusal ve maddi anlamda öğrencilere ciddi bir destek sundukları ortaya çıkmıştır. Daha önce de bahsedildiği üzere, verilen hibelere rağmen Erasmus Programı kapsamında yurtdışında bir dönemin aileler üzerinde ciddi bir ekonomik yük oluşturması mümkündür. Bu noktada, bu çalışma esnasında ailelerin bu maddi yükü karşılamak için aldıkları ekonomik sorumluluklar ve yaptıkları yatırımlar ortaya çıkmıştır. Bunlara örnek olarak bazı ailelerin bankadan kredi çekmeler, satılan ev ya da arabalardan elde edilen gelirin bir kısmının öğrencilerin Erasmus hareketliliği dönemi için ayrılması ve zaman zaman geniş aileden alınan destek gösterilebilir. Bu bulgunun Erasmus

Programı katılımının Türkiye'ye özgü pratiklerinden biri olduğunu iddia etmek mümkündür.

Buna ek olarak, öğrencilerin programa katılma kararının Türkiye'nin son yıllardaki siyasi gündeminden doğrudan etkilendiği görülmüştür. Birçok öğrenci mevcut siyasi ortamdan rahatsızlıklarını belirtmiş ve özellikle son yıllarda yaşanan terör saldırıları ve 15 Temmuz 2016 tarihindeki başarısız darbe girişimi sonrası ülkeye dair endişelerinin arttığını anlatmışlardır. Ülkedeki atmosferin özellikle kadın öğrencilerde daha büyük bir endişe yarattığını gözlemek mümkündür. Zira son zamanlarda kamusal alanda sıklıkla yaşanan tacizler ve artan baskınlar kadın öğrencileri, katılımcı sayılarında da görüleceği üzere, Erasmus Programı'na katılma konusunda cesaretlendirmektedir. Son olarak, görüşmeler Erasmus Programı'na katılmanın birçok öğrenci için mezuniyet sonrası uzun vadeli göç hedeflerinin bir parçası olduğunu ortaya koymuştur.

Ancak, bu çalışma ailenin öğrencilerin Erasmus Programı'na katılımı konusundaki etkisi üzerinde oldukça dururken, zaman kısıtlamalarından dolayı herhangi bir aile bireyi ile görüşmek mümkün olmamıştır. Bu nedenle, gelecek araştırmalar için, araştırma sürecine aile bireylerinin de dahil edilmesi çalışmaya bir derinlik ve değer katacaktır. Ayrıca, bu çalışma sadece Erasmus hareketliliği öncesi aşamaya odaklandığından, Türkiye'de Erasmus Programı'na katılım açısından daha kapsamlı bir analiz yapmak adına tüm hareketlilik döngüsünü kapsayan bir araştırma faydalı olacaktır. Son olarak, Türkiye içinde ODTÜ örnekleminin ötesine taşınan karşılaştırmalı bir araştırmak Erasmus Programı ile ilgili mevcut literatüre önemli bir katkı olacaktır.

Sonuç olarak, bu çalışma, kurumsal arka plandan katılımcıların deneyimlerine ve ailenin öğrencilerin Erasmus katılım süreçlerine kadar, ODTÜ örneğinde farklı seviyelerde öğrencilerin Erasmus hareketliliği öncesi aşamalarını kapsamlı bir şekilde ele almıştır. Bununla birlikte, Erasmus Programı, bu çalışmada gösterildiği gibi kendi bağlamını ve uygulamalarını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu nedenle, Erasmus

Programı öğrenciler için uluslararası deneyimlerin kısıtlı olduğu Türkiye’de önemli bir değer oluşturmakta ve kendi has dinamikleri ile sosyolojik bir yaklaşımı gerektirmektedir.

E. TEZ FOTOKOPİSİ İZİN FORMU

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YAZARIN

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Adı : Eren

Bölümü : Sosyoloji

TEZİN ADI (İngilizce) : Erasmus Mobility in Turkey: Motivations and Expectations of Higher Education Students at METU

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