Does Erasmus+ Programme Improve the Participants' Intercultural Communicative Competence?

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Does Erasmus+ Programme Improve the Participants' Intercultural Communicative Competence?

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Abstract

The significance of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) in foreign language teaching has been recognized with the globalization and the role of English language as a Lingua Franca (ELF) has been well-established over the last decades. Therefore, the integration of culture into the process of foreign/second language teaching is gaining more and more importance. Several studies that investigate the importance of ICC have been conducted; however, it is a matter of fact that the actual integration of ICC into language classes is quite limited. This study aims to find out the differences between two English Language Teaching student groups; namely, the ones who have participated in Erasmus+ Programme during their undergraduate education and the ones who have not, in terms of their intercultural attitude, knowledge, skill and action. The questionnaire from Ergün (2016) has been utilised to assess the participants' attitudes towards ICC. The data has been analysed through SPSS version 22 and t-test has been used to analyse the means of the two groups separately. The results of the study have revealed that there exists a statistically significant difference between the two groups of participants. The findings indicate that the group of Erasmus Students showed more positive attitudes towards ICC than the non-Erasmus Students group.

Key words: Intercultural communicative competence, Erasmus+ programme, Culture.

INTRODUCTION

The vitality of culture for the process of second/foreign language teaching and the fact that culture and language cannot be examined apart has long been recognized. "Language and culture, it could be said, represent two sides of the same coin" (Nault, 2006, p. 314). According to Kramsch (1998), culture is a "membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and common imaginings" (p. 10). On the other hand, Lee (2009) has categorized culture into two general types: Big "C" culture and little "c" culture. To be more specific, Lee (2009) refers to Big "C" culture as "the culture which represents a set of facts and statistics relating to the arts, history, geography, business, education, festivals and customs of a target speech society" (p. 78). The little "c" culture, in contrast, refers to "the invisible and deeper sense of a target culture" (Lee, 2009, p. 78) including assumptions of the routine aspects of life and attitudes. It includes themes such as tastes, gestures, hobbies, manners, core values and work ethic. As can be seen in Figure 1., Big "C" culture denotes the easily visible components of culture whereas little "c" culture represents the invisible but broader dimensions of the culture. It should be noted that the invisible part of the iceberg is far more comprehensive and multi-faceted than the visible part. Accordingly, the invisible components of the culture should also be taken into consideration when cultural characteristics are dealt with.

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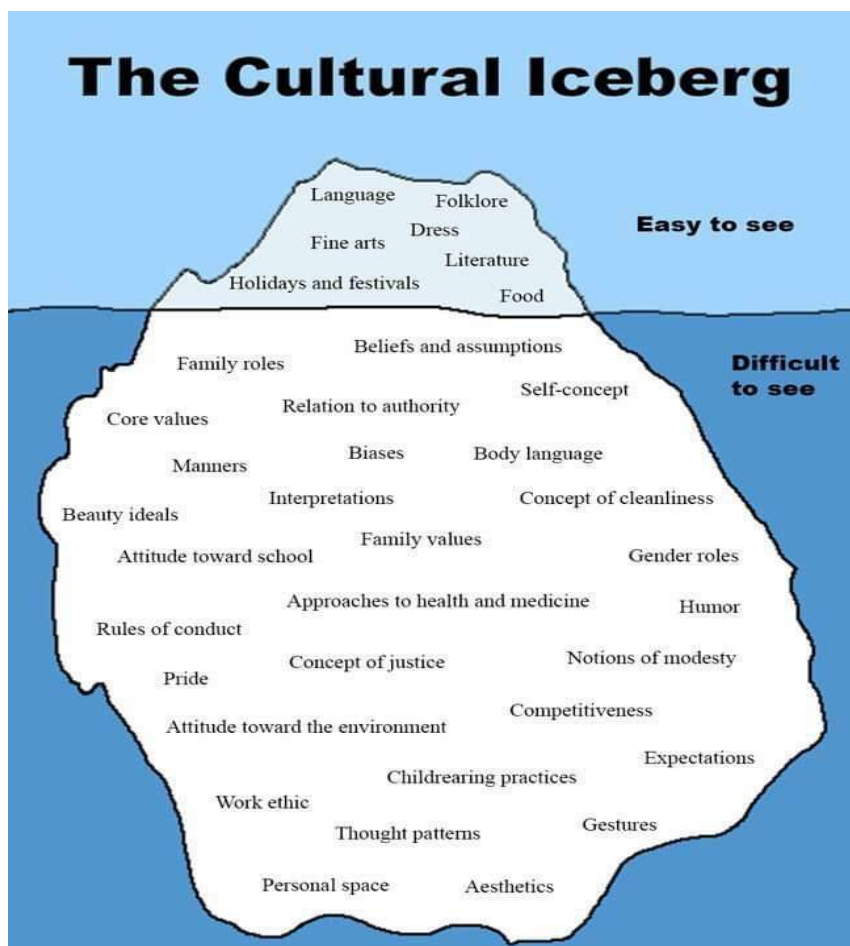
Figure 1. The cultural iceberg (Source: http://www.janinesmusicroom.com/the-rest-of-the-iceberg.html)

It should not go without saying that culture is not necessarily uniform; that is, each region, country and language host different cultures and beliefs. Therefore, when people try to communicate with or try to tell something to each other, there may be many cross-cultural errors or misunderstandings resulting from their lack of background knowledge about each other because "language is not simply sending or receiving information, but it functions as a social behaviour in certain cultural context" (Ilmu, 2015, p. 3). To prevent such cross-cultural misunderstandings, a person needs to improve his/her Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), which has been dealt with in the following part of this study.

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) can be defined as "the ability to ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, and the ability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individuality" (Byram, Gribkova & Starkey, 2002, p. 10). In a similar vein, Chen and Starosta (1999) have defined the ICC as "the ability to effectively execute communication attitudes that negotiate each other's cultural identity in a culturally diverse environment" (p. 28). ICC is a key factor in effective cross-cultural communication. Tran and Seepho (2015) assert that people need ICC as a vital skill to be able to survive in the multicultural communication environment of the 21st century. According to Thao and Tai (2017), ICC is essential because "one's knowledge, skills of interpreting, discovering, analyzing, and critical awareness will allow him or her to cope with multicultural differences to effectively and appropriately interact with others in a globalized community" (p. 633).

Exposure to the target language has been perceived as necessary and beneficial throughout the process of second/foreign language learning; similarly, the necessity and value of getting exposed to the *target*

culture has also been underscored for the development of the ICC. As an example, Boye (2016) argues that "the time in an English-speaking country is inherently beneficial for the students' learning of English and ICC development" (p. 23). Fantini (2003) defines ICC as "the complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself" (p. 1). For Vyas and Patel (2009), ICC refers to certain society norms and the undeclared rules that define acceptable or unacceptable behaviours. "ICC implies knowledge of many aspects of society and culture: forms of address, choices of register and style, differences between social and regional dialects, as well as social values attached to these differences" (Gulbinskienė & Lasauskienė, 2014, p. 153) and both linguistic and cultural competences are needed to be successful in the intercultural communication context. As Baker (2011) argues, the knowledge of grammar and lexis and the phonology of a linguistic code is not sufficient for successful intercultural communication; it should be supported by the diverse sociocultural context where the negotiation of meaning, roles, and relationships take place. Baker (2015) states that "the focus is on communication between participants with different linguaculture backgrounds" (p. 131). In other words, interactions between non-native and non-native speakers as well as non-native and native speakers need to be incorporated considering the lingua franca status of English language. Baker (2009) believes that the mother tongue of the learners and their cultural identity cannot be expected to be abandoned to adapt to the norms of the native speaker communication. Instead, Baker (2009) argues that participants should "show a willingness to accept miscommunication, and be prepared initially to be viewed as a representative of the perceived cultural values of their L1" (p.79) in an intercultural communication. This willingness clearly refers to the development of strategic competences of the speakers in that they need to be able to repair any possible breakdowns throughout the communication process.

Byram's (1997) ICC model comprises of skills, knowledge and attitudes that include critical cultural awareness, interpreting and discovering, and political education. In Byram's (1997) view, an interculturally communicative competent person should be able to take into consideration his/her own and the others' needs, values and ideas, communicate effectively, form an interaction between people from different backgrounds and always take a step to improve his communicative skills. "Intercultural speakers or mediators are able to engage with complexity and multiple identities and to avoid the stereotyping which accompanies perceiving someone through a single identity" (Byram, *et al.*, 2002, p. 5). Therefore, an interculturally communicative competent individual is also expected to be able to mediate between two parties from diverse cultural backgrounds with the help of his/her multiple identities by overcoming stereotypes. Although the model of Byram (1997) can be applied to many diverse learning environments, Baker (2009) criticizes Byram's primary emphasis on the European context and communication between L2 learners and native speakers in a particular classroom setting. In a similar vein, Risager (2007) argues that only the European notion of language is supported by Byram by not referring to the connection between English and various cultures; as a result, the importance of diversity in L2 culture pedagogy has been neglected. The current ICC concept has been expanding in the foreign language learning and teaching field. Guilherme (2002) takes a post-modernist view on culture and identities in terms of teaching them in a holistic way. As a more recent approach, Baker (2011) suggests more critical approach to culture with the representation of local, national, and transnational cultures presented in classrooms.

Communicative Competence and ICC

The ability to use the language in a proper manner produces communicative competence. It is defined by Chen (1990) as the effective and appropriate behaviour of communication in a particular environment in which individuals fulfil their own communication goals. The communicative competence model of Canale and Swain (1980) consists of *grammatical competence*, *sociolinguistic competence*, *discourse competence* and *strategic competence*. According to Canale and Swain, grammatical competence includes "knowledge of lexical items and the rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics and phonology" (1980, p. 29). While "sociolinguistic competence is made up of two sets of rules: sociocultural rules and rules of discourse" (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 30), strategic competence includes "verbal and nonverbal communication strategies that may be called

into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication" (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 30). Then, Canale (1983) added discourse competence, which is defined as the mastery of rules that adjusts ways where meanings and forms are combined to get a meaningful written and spoken texts. Regarding these four components of communicative competence, Fantini and Tirmizi (2006) argued that when a person learns a different language and wants to communicate with the speakers of that language, this person, for this new situation, needs to improve ICC as another communicative competence.

However, the traditional communicative competence model of Canale and Swain (1980) has been subject to criticism by Alptekin (2002) as it includes strict native speaker norms within the culture of the target language and fails to represent the lingua franca position of English. As such, Alptekin (2002) argues that aiming at native speaker norms is utopian, unrealistic and constraining for all the stakeholders. Rather than native speaker norms, successful bilinguals who are interculturally competent need to be considered as models for the learners. Similarly, Leung (2005) has criticized the traditional model by stating that there is still a controlling and restricting perception of the standardized native speaker of English even though the native speaker norms can be critiqued more freely in a new intellectual space. Baker (2011) has critiqued the linguistic boundaries by asking "Is English inevitably linked to these native speaker contexts even when used in very different settings?" (p. 64). Language cannot be culturally-neutral as it is used for communication that contains individuals, purposes and places. Alptekin (2002) argues that with the status of lingua franca, English is mostly used for instrumental factors such as business, academic or commercial purposes. Accordingly, the interactions between non-native speakers in English have increased; and it brings the idea that the communicative behaviour should be reconceptualised in relation to the new status of English as an International Language (EIL). In this context, Alptekin (2002) claims that "a new pedagogic model is urgently needed to accommodate the case of English as a means of international and intercultural communication" (p.63). This new model should regard EIL and aim for interculturally competent successful bilinguals who can operate both in local and international settings.

Council of Europe – Plurilingual and Pluricultural Citizens

So far, European countries have been the ones that have valued ICC in their curriculum and program the most. The Council of Europe's (CoE) Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) is a significant worldwide document that recommends the integration of culture into the process of language teaching. One of the main goals of interculturality is to "help language learners to interact with speakers of other languages on equal terms, and to be aware of their own identities and those of their interlocutors" (Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002, p. 7). The CoE has recently published a compendium to the CEFR with the aim of reinterpreting the configuration of language learning (CoE, 2017). The compendium defines the shift in the ultimate aim of language education from "native speaker mastery model" towards "plurilingual and pluricultural competence" (CoE, 2017, p. 35). The value of a linguistic and cultural repertoire within an individual has been emphasized by the plurilingual vision of language education (CoE, 2017). Learners start to use the target language as a vehicle for communication as they act as social agents (CoE, 2017).

Another important document published by the CoE is the European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL), the targeted users of which are pre-service and in-service language teachers as well as teacher trainers. According to Newby, *et al.*,

> The European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL) is a document for students undergoing initial teacher education. It will encourage you to reflect on your didactic knowledge and skills necessary to teach languages, helps you to assess your own didactic competences and enables you to monitor your progress and to record your experiences of teaching during the course of your teacher education (2007, p. 5).

It builds on insights from the CEFR and the *European Language Portfolio (ELP)* as well as the *European Profile for Language Teacher Education* (EPLTE). The portfolio offers professional

growth through self-assessment. It reflects the important aspects of language that is linked to communication. The EPOSTL includes methodological insights into teaching of culture of the language as well. With regard to cultural aspects, the portfolio provides student teachers to conduct self-assessment on whether they can select activities that improve students' intercultural competence, "create opportunities for learners to explore the culture of target language communities out of class" (Newby, *et al.*, 2007, p. 29) , "make learners aware of the interrelationship between culture and language" (Newby, *et al.*, 2007, p. 29) and "assess the learner's ability to respond and act appropriately in encounters with the target language culture" (Newby, *et al.*, 2007, p. 56). As can be understood, the value of intercultural competence in the process of foreign/second language learning process has been welcomed and appreciated by the countries across Europe.

Previous Studies on ICC in English Language Teaching

There have been several studies that investigate the ICC with a specific view to language teaching and learning. To start with, Young and Sachdev (2011) investigated experienced teachers' beliefs and practices about ICC in the US, the UK and France. The results revealed that teachers' attitudes towards ICC were mostly positive; however, it was stated that their teaching priorities were not related to interculturality. Syllabi and textbooks did not support intercultural approaches for language learning. Similarly, Ahnagari and Zamanian (2014) conducted a study in Iran Language Institute with 48 intermediate participants. They aimed to investigate the effect of intercultural text on learning. The findings showed that the experimental group which obtained extra intercultural text outperformed the control group. In a similar vein, Lázár (2015) conducted a web collaboration project by providing an *incountry* experience to develop some components of ICC. The activities of the online collaboration such as presenting students' cities and exploring the others' hometowns, discussing food, songs and customs were adapted to students' local curricula. The analysis of portfolios, forum posts and questionnaires revealed that after five months with online working, students obtained successful intercultural communication.

As for the studies conducted in the Turkish context, Atay (2009) conducted a study to investigate language teachers' attitudes towards teaching intercultural competence. The results showed that teachers had positive attitudes towards the integration of culture in language education; yet, they could not perform the cultural practices in their classrooms. Similarly, Çalışkan (2009) investigated the perceptions of English preparatory students about the target culture in English language classes by exploring the influences of sex, age and students' experiences in the USA or England. The findings showed that most of the participants had positive attitudes towards target culture learning. The age and gender of the students played an important role in that female and younger participants were more positive to learning target culture. Findings also revealed that most students strongly prefer to get cultural information via video films and documentaries. In a similar fashion, Hismanoglu (2011) examined the relationship between ICC learning, language proficiency, experience of target culture and formal education. According to the findings, significant differences did not exist between the high and low linguistic proficient students and they all had a high level of ICC. However, the students who had the experience of living abroad had higher level of ICC than those who did not. Güven (2015) attempted to find out Turkish university preparatory class students' attitudes towards learning ICC in EFL classrooms. The analysis of the data showed that students generally had positive attitudes towards learning ICC. It was found that such factors like gender, medium of instruction and proficiency levels did not play an important role in students' attitudes. However, the social sciences department students' attitudes towards learning ICC were more positive when compared to natural sciences. Another study by Ergün (2016) aimed to analyze the difference between EFL learners with traditional and ICC integrated language instruction. The results showed that there was not significant improvement in students' intercultural communicative competence in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes; however, intercultural communicative actions provided considerable development. The descriptive study of Gözgenç (2016) attempted to analyze whether the reading parts of Speakout course book series promote the acquisition of ICC of the learners. Findings of the evaluation indicated that reading content of the Speakout series is not sufficient to enhance students' ICC. Therefore, the researcher stated that educators need to give priority to intercultural elements while choosing the

course books. Parallel to the conclusions of Gözgenç's study, another research by Korkmaz (2009) supported the idea that there should be more intercultural items in textbooks of EFL classrooms. Finally, Güneş (2018) focused on the general perceptions of the learners about ICC before and after its implementation in the course and the teacher's reflections about ICC integrated lessons for professional development. The findings of the study indicated that there were important differences in learners' knowledge about different cultures after the implementation of ICC. The teacher's reflections showed that the materials used during the process kept learners interested and open to learn about new cultures. To conclude, several studies have been conducted regarding the ICC both nationally and internationally. Even though these studies declare positive perceptions towards the ICC, students' and instructors' knowledge and awareness of the ICC is regarded as insufficient. Thus, more studies are needed to examine and enhance the general perception levels. Seeing this gap, it has been decided to undertake the current research to find out the impact of studying abroad via Erasmus+ Programme on ICC.

Erasmus+ Programme

European Commission (2018) defines Erasmus+ as "the EU Programme in the fields of education, training, youth and sport for the period 2014-2020" (p. 5). According to European Commission (2018):

> The Erasmus+ Programme is designed to support Programme Countries' efforts to efficiently use the potential of Europe's talent and social assets in a lifelong learning perspective, linking support to formal, non-formal and informal learning throughout the education, training and youth fields. The Programme also enhances the opportunities for cooperation and mobility with Partner Countries, notably in the fields of higher education and youth (p. 5).

The Erasmus+ Programme improves the learning of languages and promotes the linguistic diversity as well as intercultural awareness. Bennett (2004) stated that Erasmus experience was perceived as a contribution to participants' personalities in terms of intercultural competence, leading to a certain degree of ethnorelative perspective, where "one's own culture is experienced in the context of other cultures" (p.68). According to Dincer (2014), "students experience new cultures like their own cultures and impose their own cultural values while experiencing other cultures" (p. 66-67) with the Erasmus+ Programme and he underlined the importance of these types of exchange programmes for multi- and cross-cultural education, whereby the intercultural communicative competence of the participants can be improved. Thus, the Erasmus+ Programme provides the undergraduate level students with the opportunity to live and study in a different country. Such an experience will possibly bring with it such fringe benefits as learning about and living in different cultures and, as a result, improving the ICC of the participants.

Significance of the Study

As can be gathered from the preceding sections of the study, ICC is a vital element for people to interact with people of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds in a globalized world. It is both a worthwhile aim and a requirement to become a productive individual of growing multicultural community and a world citizen. There have been several national and international studies regarding the ICC so far. However, in Turkish context, the quality and quantity of relevant studies cannot be regarded satisfactory. It has been regarded as a necessity to raise the level of awareness on the significance of ICC. Therefore, the aim of the present study is to make a comparison between two groups of English Language Teaching Department students in terms of their intercultural attitude, knowledge, skill and action. More specifically, the groups consist of students who have participated in Erasmus+ Programme during their undergraduate education and those who have not participated in Erasmus+ Programme during their undergraduate education.

Research Questions

In line with the aim of the study, the following research questions are to be addressed:

1. How do the students who have participated in Erasmus+ Programme and those who have not perceive the ICC?
2. Is there a statistically meaningful and significant difference between the perceptions of the Erasmus+ Students group and non-Erasmus+ students group?

METHODOLOGY

The main purpose of the study is to investigate the perceptional differences between Erasmus+ Students' (students who have participated in Erasmus+ Programme) and non-Erasmus+ Students' (students who have not participated in Erasmus+ Programme). In this present study, descriptive quantitative research design has been used. According to Creswell (2013), this particular research design is mostly used in educational contexts because of its practicality and high reliability; however, descriptive research results are open to different interpretations and also it should be noted that it may ignore individualism. Additionally, a 5 point Likert-type format questionnaire has been utilized within the study; however, the participants may tend to answer questions in such a way that they believe expected of them; thus, weakening the reliability level of the findings as a result of "social desirability bias" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 54). Consequently, both gathering and interpretation of the questionnaire have been made in a quantitative manner.

Sample/Participants

Participants

As mentioned above, participants in this study have been classified into 2 groups; namely, participants who have taken part in Erasmus+ project and who have not. Both groups have the same number of participants, 28 to 28. Erasmus group participants are Hacettepe University English Language Teaching Department graduates and students. Similarly, non-Erasmus students are from Süleyman Demirel University English Language Teaching Department.

Table 1. Erasmus students' demographic data

Gender	N	%
Female	23	82.0
Male	5	18.0
Total	28	100.0

Table 2. Non-Erasmus students' demographic data

Gender	N	%
Female	20	71.0
Male	8	29.0
Total	28	100.0

Table 3. Total demographic data

Gender	N	%
Female	43	77.0
Male	13	23.0
Total	56	100.0

Sampling

Because of the reachability of the intended type, the technique of *convenience sampling* (Dörnyei, 2007) has been utilized within the study. Due to the challenges in finding students who have

participated to an Erasmus+ programme, participation of Hacettepe University English Language Department has been requested and, in return, volunteers from Hacettepe University English Language Teaching Department have agreed to participate.

Instruments

Questionnaire

In order to test students' general knowledge about and attitude towards ICC, the questionnaire from Ergün (2016) has been employed in this study. However, the original form of the questionnaire was a checklist, which has been taken from the original document by the CoE (Barrett & Huber, 2014). The 28 sentences in the original checklist have been transformed into a 5 point Likert-type format questionnaire (5 = strongly agree; 4 = agree; 3 = neutral; 2 = disagree; 1 = strongly disagree) in English and it has been used to collect the required data. The questionnaire can be examined in 4 subsections; namely, *Attitude*, *Knowledge*, *Skill*, *Action* and each subsection consists of 7 questions trying to investigate students' attitudes, knowledge and abilities regarding different cultures and implementations of these aspects in their daily lives. Although the questionnaire has been implemented in Turkish context previously by Ergün (2016), the reliability level of the questionnaire has been recalculated for the specific context in which the present study has been conducted.

Data collection procedures

Firstly, the questionnaire has been uploaded to Google Docs. In the form, participants have filled in their demographic data first. Then they have been asked to give an answer to all of the questions in order to finish the questionnaire. As a next step, 28 non-Erasmus, 3rd grade students from Süleyman Demirel University English Language Teaching Department have been gathered in a hall. Via using their mobile phones, they have entered their answers. In case they could have a problem, the researchers were also present in the hall and they provided help and clarification when the students had problems in terms of understanding the terminology in the questionnaire. Finally, in order to collect data from Erasmus-students, an online group of Hacettepe students and graduates has been benefitted. The questionnaire has been posted online and the results have been gathered. While collecting the data from the participants, their consents have been taken in terms of using their data for the purpose of this study.

Data analysis

In order to check the reliability level of the implemented questionnaire, SPSS version 22 has been utilised. Kaiser Meyer Olkin (KMO) sample adequacy test has been used so as to check the applicability of the data collection tool. Lastly, to crosscheck the reliability score obtained by the KMO test, Cronbach Alpha Coefficient has been applied. According to Ho (2014), in order to check a test's reliability level, Cronbach's alpha can be used and if the score taken via Cronbach's alpha is higher than ,80, it can be concluded that the items in the questionnaire are reliable and the test is consistent in itself. Similar to Ergün (2016), the test's reliability level has been found to be appropriate for implementation with a score of ,919.

Table 4. Reliability statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,919	,923	28

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

In this part of the study, the two research questions given above have been dealt with under two sections. In the first part, general perception of the students regarding ICC has been discussed and compared. In the second part, the question whether there are significant and meaningful differences in terms of the perceptions of Erasmus+ students and non-Erasmus+ students has been answered and discussed and the items of the questionnaire have been shown.

Research Question 1: How do the students who have participated in Erasmus and those who have not perceive the ICC?
The questionnaire, as a whole, tries to have a general look upon participants' perceptional levels regarding ICC. In order to have a deeper look, the means of the two groups need to be examined. According to Ho (2014), in order to understand if there is a tendency towards a phenomenon, one may use the mean of the scores as a central tendency measure. Therefore, it can be concluded from Table 5. that Erasmus Students (ES) group has a positive tendency towards ICC as a whole.

Table 5. Means of the ES group

Number of Items	28
Mean	4,6188
Median	4,6607
Std. Deviation	,25507
Minimum	4,00
Maximum	4,96

Since the questionnaire is consists of 5 point Likert-type format items, the maximum score is 5. As can be seen in the table, the mean score of the ES group is 4.6 out of 5. Therefore, it can be inferred that the ES group has a positive tendency towards the concept of ICC. Similarly, when looked at the results of the non-Erasmus Students (NES) group, one can conclude that they nearly have the same results. As can be seen in Table 6., their tendency towards ICC is also high.

Table 6. Means of the NES group

Number of Items	28
Mean	4,2418
Median	4,25
Std. Deviation	,39967
Minimum	3,29
Maximum	5

Table 6. shows that the mean score of the NES group is 4,2 out of 5. In comparison to the mean score of the ES group, the mean score of the NES group is a bit lower. In this respect, the results of this study are consistent with Atay (2009), who has investigated ICC perceptions of the in-service English teachers and demonstrated a positive tendency towards the concept of ICC. Even though the participants' profiles and experiences in the two studies' may differ, the results can be interpreted as consistent across the two studies. However, the findings of this study are not consistent with the findings in Baroudi (2017), in which the ICC levels of English Language Teaching (ELT) students are at a moderate level. All in all, it can be concluded that both groups have positive tendencies towards ICC. It should also be noted that the mean score of the NES group is a lower than that of the ES group, which implies that Erasmus+ Programme has a facilitative influence on the ICC perception of the participants. In the next part of the study, the results of the t-Test applied to these 2 groups of scores will be presented and discussed with a specific view to the second research question.

Research question 2: Is there a statistically meaningful and significant difference between the perceptions of the Erasmus+ Students group and non-Erasmus+ Students group?

The findings of the first research question clearly demonstrate that ICC has been welcomed and appreciated by both the ES group and the NES group. However, the mean score of the NES group is a bit lower than that of the ES group. Accordingly, the second research question aims to identify if the difference is statistically significant and meaningful. As Ho (2014) stated, if *p* (sig. 2 – tailed) is lower than 1 (*p*<1), then there is a significant difference between the scores of the two groups. Table 7 shows the results of the t-Test conducted with the aim of identifying the significance of the difference.

Table 7. t-Test results for the whole questionnaire

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
							95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
2,630	,111	4,207	54	,000	,37694	,08960	,19729	,55658

As can be seen in Table 7., with a score of *',000'*, it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups. And since the means of the ES group is higher than the NES group, it can be inferred that the students who have participated in Erasmus+ Programme exhibit more positive attitudes towards ICC as a whole. Hismanoglu (2011) stated that studying in foreign countries helps students to develop their ICC. Similarly, in the present study, the interpretation that having the opportunity to live in a different country might contribute positively to the development of ICC of the students can be arrived at. In a similar way, Almarza, *et al.* (2015) concludes that exchange program students have high ICC levels. As has been highlighted in the previous parts of the study, Erasmus+ Programme experience possibly renders the students more knowledgeable about and tolerant to the peculiarities of other cultures.

Additionally, as has been aforementioned, the questionnaire consists of four sub-sections (namely; *Attitude*, *Knowledge*, *Skill*, *Action*) and each of these sub-sections involves seven descriptor items. In the following sections of the study, these four sub-sections of the questionnaire have been analysed and the results of the analyses have been discussed.

Attitude Section

As Ajzen (1993) stated, an attitude is a person's tendency to express appreciation or displeasure to a behaviour, person or incident. As a result, this part of the questionnaire has mainly aimed to reveal the participants' attitudes towards ICC. On an attitudinal basis, it can be argued that if the results are high, then their tendency towards ICC can be considered as high.

Table 8. Attitude section items and means

	Means of ES	Means of NES	Total of Means
1. I value cultural diversity and pluralism of views and practices.	4,89	4,39	4,64
2. I respect people who have different cultural affiliations from mine.	5	4,89	4,95
3. I am open to, curious about and willing to learn from and about people who have different cultural orientations and perspectives from mine	4,96	4,5	4,73
4. I am willing to empathise with people who have different cultural affiliations from mine.	4,92	4,57	4,75

5. I am willing to question what is usually taken for granted as 'normal' according to my previously acquired knowledge and experience.	4,53	4	4,27
6. I am willing to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty.	4	3,89	3,95
7. I am willing to seek out opportunities to engage and co- operate with individuals who have different cultural orientations and perspectives from mine.	4,71	4,53	4,63

Table 8. presents an investigation on students' general attitudes in an intercultural context. The biggest difference between the mean scores of the two groups is in the 5th item which tries to ask participants whether they question their 'standards'. From the results it can be seen that the ES group seem to question their norms more than the NES group. This may have resulted from their experiences in foreign cultures and from their foreign friends. It might be also concluded that their horizons and perspectives alter in a broader manner. Among the seven items within the attitude section, the lowest item is the 6th item for both the ES and the NES group. More specifically, it seems surprising that the ES group has not shown much tolerance towards ambiguity even though they have been abroad and may have encountered unexpected and ambiguous experiences. This finding implies that having been abroad may not have an observable impact on tolerance of ambiguity. However, this item emerges a new research topic in itself which needs to be investigated more.

Table 9. t-Test results for attitude section

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
9,684	,003	3,839	54	,000	,321429	,083726	,153569	,489289

Looking at the information emerged from attitudinal differences between the ES group and the NES group, a significant difference can be inferred with a score of *,000*. As can be seen in Table 9., the mean difference between the two groups is *',32'*. Consequently, it can be concluded that the ES group exhibits more positive attitudes towards ICC than the NES group. This finding supports the claim that studying abroad contributes to the ICC of the students.

Knowledge Section

According to Bolisani (2018), knowledge is defined as a reasonable true belief. Hence, it is an important factor in terms of ICC. Therefore, this part of the questionnaire aims to take a general look upon the participants' knowledge about ICC and related problems that may occur in an intercultural context. If a person is not aware of other cultures, consequently, it would not be justified to expect the person to have a high level of ICC perception.

Table 10. Knowledge section items and means

	Means of ES	Means of NES	Total of Means
8. I understand the internal diversity and heterogeneity of all cultural groups.	4,68	4,32	4,5
9. I am aware of and understand my own and other people's assumptions, preconceptions, stereotypes, prejudices, and overt and covert discrimination.	4,64	4,35	4,41
10. I understand the influence of one's own language and cultural affiliations on one's experience of the world and of other people.	4,92	4,46	4,70
11. I am aware of the fact that other peoples' languages may express shared	4,78	4,57	4,68

ideas in a unique way or express unique ideas difficult to access through one's own language(s).			
12. I am aware of the fact that people of other cultural affiliations may follow different verbal and non- verbal communicative conventions which are meaningful from their perspective.	4,89	4,5	4,70
13. I have the knowledge of the beliefs, values, practices, discourses and products that may be used by people who have particular cultural orientations.	4,5	4,28	4,39
14. I understand processes of cultural, societal and individual interaction, and of the socially constructed nature of knowledge.	4,71	4,39	4,55

As can be seen in the Table 10., knowledge section has tried to investigate participants' existing level of information as to different cultures' beliefs, values, implementations and participant's awareness about stereotypes, prejudices and differences between cultures. The biggest difference between the mean scores of the groups can be observed in the 10th item, which has tried to gather data about participants' opinions on peoples' world view, whether peoples' culture and language change the way people tend to act and feel in certain circumstances. In line with the linguistic relativism interpretation of the Sapir-Whorfian hypothesis, the language people speak tends to influence how they perceive the world around them. From this result, it can be concluded that studying abroad might have a positive impact on participants' awareness about different world views and how they change in accordance with cultures and languages. Among the seven items within the knowledge section, the lowest item is the 13th item for both the ES and the NES group. From this sense, it might be concluded that the difficult-to-see (see Figure 1) knowledge of culture, which is referred to as little 'c' culture, has not been wholly realized by both groups.

Table 11. t-Test results for knowledge section

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
							95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
F	Sig.	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
2,055	,157	3,118	54	,003	,29592	,09490	,10565	,486619

As can be seen in Table 11., the mean difference between the two groups is ',29'. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is not a huge gap between the means of the two groups. Indeed, knowledge section has been the part with the least mean difference. Also, the *p* score is *,003*. From this perspective, it can be inferred that, even though there is not a big difference between the mean scores, there is, still, a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the ES and the NES groups.

Skill Section

As stated by Attewell (1990), skill refers to competence or proficiency. Therefore, this section of the questionnaire has generally focused on participants' proficiencies towards ICC. In other words, whether they can repair an intercultural problem and how they react in an intercultural setting is focused on in this section of the questionnaire.

Table 12. Skill section items and means

	Means of ES	Means of NES	Total of Means
15. I am able to decentre from my perspective and to take other people's perspectives into consideration in addition to mine.	4,46	4,14	4,30
16. I am able to discover information about other cultural affiliations and perspectives.	4,75	4,44	4,60
17. I am able to interpret other cultural practices, beliefs and values and relating them to mine.	4,64	4,42	4,54
18. I am able to understand and respond to other people's thoughts, beliefs, values and feelings.	4,82	4,42	4,63
19. I am able to adapt my behaviour to new cultural environments – for example, avoiding verbal and non- verbal behaviours which may be viewed as impolite by people who have different cultural affiliations from mine.	4,60	4,17	4,39
20. I am able to manage breakdowns in communication.	4,25	3,82	4,04
21. I am able to act as a mediator in intercultural exchanges, and translate, interpret and explain.	4,39	3,64	4,02

It can be understood from Table 12. that questions are focusing on students' abilities in intercultural contexts. The greatest difference between the mean scores of the groups can be observed in the 21st item, which attempts to investigate whether participants conduct themselves as a mediator in intercultural domains. Within this aspect, it can be seen that the ES group has more inclination towards the skill of mediating. This may be because of the experiences that the ES group has faced during the time they have spent abroad. They have possibly encountered more chances to be able to act as a mediator. Therefore, having the opportunity to interact with people from other cultures and practice them gradually might have contributed to the skill of mediating. In addition, as can be seen in Table 12., the mean scores of the two groups can also be regarded as low for the 20th item in the skill section. Both groups seem to think that they are lacking the strategic competence that might help them maintain a healthy conversation by repairing possible breakdowns throughout the conversation. In fact, as a component of communicative competence, strategic competence is crucial for the students as it will render them fluent and competent in an intercultural context.

Table 13. t-Test results for skill section

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
1,736	,193	3,743	54	,000	,41582	,11109	,19310	,63853

As can be seen in Table 13., the mean difference between the two groups is ,41, which is the second highest in the whole questionnaire. Thus, this can be interpreted as the ES group has shown more positive inclination towards ICC than the NES group. Also, it can be concluded that with a score of ,000, there is a statistically significant difference between the ES and the NES. This can refer to a difference on students' competences regarding ICC. Ultimately, it can be inferred that the NES group are aware of ICC but sometimes fail to understand or think what they can do about a problem that has occurred due to cross-cultural differences or lack of knowledge.

Action Section

As its name suggests, action is the process of doing something to realize something or to cope with a situation. Therefore, this section of the questionnaire bears the most striking differences because this

part has originally aimed to test participants' actions as well as actual implementations of ICC in their daily lives or occasions they have come across.

Table 14. Action section items and means

	Means of ES	Means of NES	Total of Means
22. I seek opportunities to engage with people who have different cultural orientations and perspectives from mine.	4,64	3,89	4,27
23. I interact and communicate appropriately, effectively and respectfully with people who have different cultural affiliations from mine.	4,78	4,32	4,55
24. I cooperate with individuals who have different cultural orientations on shared activities and ventures, discuss differences in views and perspectives, and construct common views and perspectives.	4,71	4,07	4,39
25. I challenge attitudes and behaviors (including speech and writing) which contravene human rights, and take action to defend and protect the dignity and human rights of people regardless of their cultural affiliations	4,17	4,07	4,12
26. I intervene and express opposition when there are expressions of prejudice or acts of discrimination against individuals or groups.	4,42	3,82	4,13
27. I challenge cultural stereotypes and prejudices.	4,10	3,78	3,95
28. I encourage positive attitudes towards the contributions to society made by individuals irrespective of their cultural affiliations.	4,53	4,07	4,30

As can be seen in Table 14., as the items are related to actions in intercultural contexts, real life incidents have been covered by the questionnaire. From this perspective, this section of the questionnaire can shed light on students' actions towards different cultures. The items in this section of the questionnaire have aimed to uncover whether they are seeking opportunities to interact and cooperate with people who have different cultural backgrounds or how they can overcome problems related to culture such as violation of human rights, prejudices, and stereotypes. The biggest difference between two groups of mean scores can be observed in the 22nd item, which tries to reveal whether students try to create chances to interact with people from other cultures. Apparently, the ES group has more attempts to contact with people from other cultural affiliations, which might be due to their experiences during their participation in the Erasmus+ Programme. Surprisingly, even though the NES group are future language instructors, they seem to be indecisive about the item and lacking the motivation to do so. In a similar way, it might be understood from the 27th item that, even though students participate in an exchange programme and live temporarily in a foreign country, the stereotypes in their minds towards other cultures are not totally removed.

Table 15. t-Test results for action section

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
,288	,594	3,319	54	,002	,480	,14451	,18986	,76933

As can be observed in Table 15., the mean difference between the ES group and the NES group is *,48*. This finding clearly indicates that the ES group shows more positive inclination in applying their prior knowledge to solve cross-cultural problems and misunderstandings they encounter in their daily lives. In addition, *p* score is *,002*; thus, it can be inferred that there is a statistically significant difference between the ES group and the NES group. Another conclusion that can be drawn from these results is that, despite the general knowledge of the NES group in terms of ICC, they seem to fail to implement this knowledge in their daily lives. To sum up, a statistically significant difference between the two

groups' (ES – NES) perceptions towards ICC has been observed as a result of the analyses conducted. To be more specific, although the participants claim to know about and respect other cultures, they tend not to reflect their awareness in their daily lives through their actions. However, as this finding has not been supported by observations of the participants' real life behaviours, it would be justified to argue that, under the effect of "social desirability bias" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 54), the participants in the ES group may have answered the questions in the action section of the questionnaire in a way that they believe researchers expected them to act. As a result, the findings may have been contaminated to some extent.

CONCLUSION

The study has aimed to make a comparison in terms of participants' intercultural *attitude*, *knowledge*, *skill* and *action* between two groups of English Language Teaching Department students; namely, the students who have participated in Erasmus+ Programme during their undergraduate education and those who have not participated in Erasmus+ Programme during their undergraduate education. This study has revealed that both the ES and the NES groups have positive inclination towards the concept of ICC. However, the findings of the analyses demonstrate that there is a statistically significant difference between the ES group and the NES group students in terms of their general perceptions towards ICC. The questionnaire that has been employed within this study is comprised of four different sections; namely, *Attitude*, *Knowledge*, *Skill*, and *Action*.

Attitude section has tried to reveal participants' appreciations and displeasures of ICC. From the results of the attitude section of the questionnaire, it has been concluded that there is a statistically significant difference between the ES group and the NES group. The least difference between the participants' mean scores has been observed in the knowledge section. This part of the questionnaire has tried to get information about participants' general beliefs and awareness of ICC. From the results of the knowledge section, it can be concluded that even though the NES group students have not participated in Erasmus+ Programme, their awareness of ICC is still high. The underlying reason of this tendency can be attributed to the fact that they are studying at ELT departments. As for the skill section, the results are nearly similar. Skill section has targeted to view participants' competences of solving possible problems that may occur in an intercultural context. It has been inferred that there is a significant difference between the mean scores of the groups. The maximum difference, however, has been observed in the action section. This part has tried to uncover if students implement their answers in their daily lives or in problematic situations. Although most participants have displayed positive tendencies toward ICC in the attitude, knowledge and skill sections, looking at their answers in the action section, it can be concluded that even if their knowledge is high regarding ICC, they seem to fail to transform their knowledge and attitude into action in their daily lives. To sum up, in this study, a general perceptional questionnaire has been used, and the results clearly indicate that even if both ES and NES group students' tendencies towards ICC are high, there is a significant difference between them. Thus, the conclusion that can be drawn from these findings is that Erasmus+ Programme has a positive influence on students regarding their perceptions towards ICC. As a result, it would be justified to argue that the quantity and quality of these types of exchange programmes should be increased. However, it should not be ignored that the data obtained from the participants via the questionnaire may not reflect participants' real perceptions towards ICC. It is possible to speculate that they basically might not put their perceptions into action in their daily lives even though they have shown high inclinations towards ICC. To overcome this weakness, a more comprehensive and longitudinal study can be conducted on the concept of ICC that employs an observational research design with the aim of verifying and crosschecking the data gathered from quantitative data collection tools.

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