

**The Impact of Study Abroad on Kazakhstani Students' Academic Expectations**

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*Aigul Rakisheva*

**The Impact of Study Abroad  
on Kazakhstani Students' Academic Expectations**

**Abstract**

This study aims to identify the impacts of studying abroad on Kazakhstani students' academic expectations, for those who studied under the short-term Erasmus + academic mobility program as well as the experience of academic life at their home institutions after their return. Furthermore, the study employs a qualitative approach using the case study of a leading state university in cosmopolitan Kazakhstan as well as semi-structured interviews with ten university students. The findings reveal that students who participated in the program consider the Erasmus experience as a key element for academic performance and further professional growth. Additionally, the interviewees felt that their participation in the program helped them become more open, sociable, independent, and ready for new changes in life. Moreover, they expressed the belief that they had improved their critical thinking skills and had become more creative and active. Thus, according to study participants, educational institutions should actively provide the necessary information about the program to students as well as support returning students to

create the appropriate conditions for the students' academic activities. However, participants recognized concerns over language barriers, teaching, and bureaucratic problems at home institutions as well as a shock in adaptation after return.

Consequently, it is necessary to conduct an in-depth study of the process of the participants' re-entry in further research.

*Keywords:* short-term student mobility, internationalization, academic expectations, study abroad, Erasmus +

### **Қазақстандық Студенттердің Академиялық Үмітіне Шетелдік Оқытудың Әсері**

#### **Аңдатпа**

Бұл зерттеу Erasmus + қысқа мерзімді академиялық ұтқырлық бағдарламасы шеңберінде оқыған Қазақстандық студенттердің академиялық үміттеріне шетелде оқытудың әсерін анықтауға және қайтып оралғаннан кейін өздерінің оқу орындарында академиялық өмір тәжірибесін анықтауға бағытталған. Бұл зерттеуде университеттің он студентімен жартылай құрылымдалған сұхбат негізінде космополит Қазақстанның жетекші мемлекеттік университеттерінің бірінде сапалы зерттеу әдісі (тақырыптық зерттеу) пайдаланылды. Нәтижелер зерттеуге қатысушылар Erasmus тәжірибесін үлгерімнің және одан әрі кәсіби өсудің негізгі элементі ретінде қарастыратынын көрсетті. Сонымен қатар, зерттеу респонденттері бағдарламаға қатысу тәжірибесі оларға ашық, көпшіл, тәуелсіз және өмірдегі жаңа өзгерістерге дайын болуға көмектескенін атап өтті. Сондай-ақ, олар сыни ойлау дағдыларын жақсартып, шығармашылық және белсенді болғандарына сенімділігін көрсетті. Осылайша, зерттеуге қатысушылардың пікірінше, оқу орындары студенттерге бағдарлама туралы қажетті ақпаратты белсенді түрде ұсынуы, сондай-ақ студенттердің оқу іс-әрекеті үшін тиісті жағдай жасау үшін қайтып келген

студенттерді қолдауы тиіс. Дегенмен, студенттер тілдік кедергілер, өз оқу орындарындағы оқыту және бюрократиялық мәселелері, сондай-ақ қайтып оралғаннан кейін бейімделудегі күйзеліс туралы өз алаңдаушылығын мойындады. Демек, одан әрі зерттеулер арқылы қатысушылардың қайта кіру процесін терең зерделеу қажет.

*Түйінді сөздер:* студенттердің қысқа мерзімді мобильділігі, интернационализация, академиялық күту, шетелде оқыту, Erasmus +

### **Влияние Обучения За Рубежом на Академические Ожидания Казахстанских Студентов**

#### **Аннотация**

Данное исследование было направлено на выявление влияния обучения за рубежом на академические ожидания Казахстанских студентов, которые учились в рамках краткосрочной программы академической мобильности Erasmus +, и опыта академической жизни в своих учебных заведениях после возвращения. В этом исследовании использовался качественный подход (тематическое исследование) одного из ведущих государственных университетов космополитического Казахстана на основе полу структурированных интервью с десятью студентами университета. Результаты показали, что участники исследования, рассматривают опыт Erasmus как ключевой элемент успеваемости и дальнейшего профессионального роста. Кроме того, респонденты отметили, что опыт участия в программе помог им стать более открытыми, общительными, независимыми и готовыми к новым изменениям в жизни. Они также выразили уверенность об улучшении своих навыков критического мышления, а также стали более творческими и активными. Таким образом, по

мнению участников исследования, учебные заведения должны активно предоставлять студентам необходимую информацию о программе, а также поддерживать возвращающихся студентов, чтобы создать соответствующие условия для учебной деятельности студентов. Тем не менее, студенты также признали свою озабоченность по поводу языковых барьеров, проблем с преподаванием и бюрократическими проблемами в домашних учреждениях, а также шок в адаптации после возвращения. Следовательно, необходимо углубленно изучить процесс повторного входа участников посредством дальнейших исследований.

*Ключевые слова:* краткосрочная мобильность студентов, интернационализация, академические ожидания, обучение за рубежом, Erasmus +

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## **The Impact of Study Abroad on Kazakhstani Students' Academic Expectations**

### **Chapter I: Introduction**

This chapter presents background information about the research context, formulates the problem, the purpose of the study, and the research questions and significance of the study. The chapter concludes with a brief outline of the thesis for structuring the study.

#### **Background Information**

One of the most important national and global priorities today is higher education and science as indicators of social development. Considering this, the main goal of the State Program for the Development of Education in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2011-2020 is to increase the competitiveness of education and the development of human capital for access to quality education. One of the ways of developing education and its quality for Kazakhstan is the internationalization of education goal (Seidahmetov, 2014).

Internationalization as one of the most significant trends in the development of higher education contributes to the competitiveness of countries and regions. Obviously, that the higher education systems of a country cannot develop outside global development trends. National criteria should no longer be a guideline for the reform and development of the higher education system. There is a need to strengthen the international component in organizing the training of a competent specialist to ensure the internationalization of higher education and science (Knight, 2003; Otter, 2007; Tekin & Gencer, 2013).

An important dimension of the internationalization of higher education is academic mobility of students. International student mobility is clearly a reflection of the modern, globalizing world, where young talented individuals actively seek for social lifts and for

attractive professional opportunities not just within their city, state of residence or within their region, but globally (Leask, 2007; Ileleji, 2009).

Along with student mobility study abroad also a key component of the internationalization process. According to Scwwald (2012), “there are programs for those who want to spend one or more semesters abroad, maybe even want to get a degree at an international institution and there are other programs aimed at students who want to spend only a limited number of days or weeks in an international environment” (p.45). One form of study abroad is student exchange. In Schwald (2012), Liu and Dai (2012) studies, student exchange is a key component of internationalization. The diverse programs, for example, DAAD, Fulbright, Chevening, Commonwealth are also aimed at enhancing the image of Kazakhstan's higher education and contribute to the development of the process of internationalization. According to the Lifelong Learning Program (2014), Erasmus is the most excellent study abroad program with an average of 230,000 students per year from the EU members and Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, and Turkey countries. Since 1987, the total number of participants is about 3 million students, € 450,000 annual budget, the involvement of 33 countries and about 4,000 institutions (Lifelong Learning Program, 2014).

In the context of my research, Erasmus will be used as an exchange program (short-term outgoing student mobility) in higher education for one (six months) or two semesters under the name Erasmus +, starting in 2014. Every year the program provides an opportunity for young people in Kazakhstan to study in participating European universities. According to the National Erasmus+ Office in Kazakhstan from 2015 to 2017, the total number of mobility grants awarded to Kazakhstan was 2236 (629, 826, 781, respectively). At the same time, the total number of participants who left Kazakhstan for European countries amounted to 1,537 people, including 791 students (260, 277, 254

correspondingly) and the rest were administrative staff. The total amount of funding is 7,832,000 euros. This statistical data proves that Erasmus + annually allocates grants to Kazakhstan and supports our country's participation in the program. Meanwhile, Kazakhstan is actively using grants, as shown by the number of participants who left Kazakhstan for European countries

### **Problem Statement**

The Erasmus program provides students with the opportunity to obtain educational experience in various university systems and participate in other learning processes different from their own country (Stilianos et al., 2013). This is commended in the European Commission's report (2013). Former participants of the program defined it as a life change and the opportunity of personal and academic development (Storti, 2001). Also, the Erasmus program provides multicultural and intercultural education. One of the most important goals of the program is the impact of different cultures and different styles of education on students, thus making a change in participants' expectations unavoidable (Stilianos, Georgios, Vasilik, & Labros, 2013). In studies related to Erasmus, students identified their experience of participating in the program as "life changing", "turning point", "experience of a lifetime", "eye-opening", and "horizon broadening" (Ileleji, 2009, p.37, Tekin & Gencer, 2013, p.114; Teichler, 2004, p.406).

Kazakhstani students can also participate in this program. Mobility of students is a defining feature of Kazakhstan's internationalization efforts. The goal of the education system according to the Strategy of academic mobility for 2011-2020 is that every fifth student will engage in academic mobility.

However, for the implementation of the goals of increasing student mobility there are three main problems. These include the following: the importance of data and policy

making, the lack of information from developing countries (or emerging economies), and the need to understand academic expectations (OECD, 2017).

According to OECD report (2017), many Kazakhstani universities have an International Cooperation Office engaged in the development of international relations and student support. However, the OECD review team (OECD, 2017) reported that there are significant differences in the extent to which institutions prepare students for international experience and help them make use of their experiences to Kazakhstan. The lack of understanding of the academic implications of studying abroad can become a barrier for higher institutions to provide adequate educational opportunities for returnees. These mechanisms cannot be determined without reliable data about program. Each education system needs reliable, high-quality data for policy development and evaluation. For the university policy data on the impact of “international experience” on individuals is particularly important (OECD, 2017).

Also, as noted by OECD experts (OECD, 2017), universities in Kazakhstan collect a variety of data on student mobility and internationalization, and manage them in different ways. As a consequence, Kazakhstan lacks a nationally coordinated database on internationalization. Without reliable long-term data, decision-making and evaluation are problematic. Data need to be openly available, accessible and shareable if they are to have any effect. Information is important, since the members of Erasmus return with significant, valuable knowledge that could be used more intensively (OECD, 2017).

In addition, according to Roy, Newman, Ellenberger & Pyman (2018) in the overwhelming majority, a significant part of the previous studies on student mobility depends on the results obtained by the students from the USA, Europe or developed countries, while the results and benefits received by students from other countries in Asia, Latin America or Africa received limited attention. Moreover, European and North-

American research focus mainly on benefits for and results of students coming from these regions and ignore the impact of students from Latin America, Africa and Asia on the overall picture (Institute of International Education, 2017). Also, most studied on the experience of Erasmus participants were conducted in European countries by Beerkens, 2016; Deakin, 2013; Souto-Otero, 2016, while the data for other countries participating in the program are limited.

A further limiter of existing research on international student mobility is the lack of data on the role and effect of Erasmus program for academic expectations of Kazakhstani students. Although the cultural dimension is important for participants, the high quality of education as an academic expectation is still the main reason for students to participate in mobility programs (Mutlu et al., 2013; Stilianos et al., 2013). As works focused on the academic expectations of students, and return/adaptation in their own university after the program are limited, this often creates barriers for students to participate in Erasmus +. Firstly, "home ties"- the difficulties with leaving their work, family and other personal relationships. Secondly, "alternative expectations"- the anxiety about choosing a university of their own accord. Also, the Erasmus programs are too short, while students are interested in receiving a full degree. Thirdly, "disruption of studies" - expected difficulties in recognizing credit with their regular curriculum and incompatibility with the academic calendar. Either the uncertainty about the quality of education system abroad and the difficulty in finding the appropriate program in the host country. Fourthly, "financial and administrative constraints" - students' concerns about the cost of studying and living abroad, and, the level of the Erasmus grant. Also, this includes difficulties connected with administrative requirements (Beerkens et al., 2016, p. 189-192).

Finally, the desire of some participants to go back abroad is seen as the reverse cultural shock mentioned in the Cohen study (2003). Therefore, the repatriates' opinion

should be considered. Re-adjustment to the academic life remains still unclear despite the fact that the levels of satisfaction and adaptation to academic culture abroad are studied in detail.

Having considered all mentioned, this study will explore the change of academic expectations of the participants in Erasmus program, and how participants experience academic life at their home institutions after their return.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The expectation to receive high quality education is still a prime reason to participate in the Erasmus program (Mutlu et al., 2013; Stilianos et al., 2013). However, research in the academic impacts in terms of changes in academic expectations of Kazakhstani students after studying abroad is limited. It is also important to study the experience of the academic life of program participants after returning to their home institutions.

Therefore, the objectives of the study are:

- explore the change of academic expectations of the participants in Erasmus program;
- how participants experience academic life at their home institutions after their return.

### **Research Questions**

How has the participation of Erasmus program changed the academic expectation of participants?

How have participants experienced academic life at their home institutions after their return?

**Significance of the Study**

Studies on the Erasmus program are mainly considered in terms of the academic impact of studying abroad. However, the change in student expectations, and their re-entry to the home institutions remain understudied, the results are beneficial for faculty, students, and universities. For instance, this study will be interesting for students who would like to participate in study abroad programs in the future. Also, the results of the study can be used by the professors, institutions, and international offices of the universities to students' adaptation, since their level of expectation and satisfaction change after receiving foreign experience and in the process of return there are some difficulties that need to be considered. Determining the academic impact of studying abroad and how the program will change students' expectations will enable institutions to provide appropriate opportunities for returnees.

The results would contribute to existing knowledge of the impact of international mobility on those who participate, and on the economy and society more widely. This will thus allow a more efficient process of evaluating internationalization. Additionally, more information about the impacts of "International experience" on individuals will allow Kazakhstani institutions to compare themselves with other countries. For example, for this purpose Kazakhstan, might draw on ongoing international initiatives regarding diploma recognition and credit transfers.

Additionally, this study may help to reduce the society biases and will enhance more thorough understanding of the steps involved in study abroad. This, in turn, will contribute to creating the most favorable environment for study abroad as well as within the country.

**Outline of the Thesis**

This study includes six chapters. The first chapter discusses the context and problem of the study. In addition, the purpose and importance of the study.

Further research questions in the same chapter. The second chapter presents a review of the literature on research into this problem. This chapter is divided into themes that are organized into sections in accordance with the research questions. For example, in the literature review, there is the topic of academic expectations and the process of re-entry. Besides, in Chapter II, the concepts of internationalization in education, study abroad and the Erasmus + are considered. The conceptual framework is also presented in Chapter II. Chapter III of this thesis is devoted to the research methodology. Namely, explanations are given regarding the design of the study, sampling and, site. Additionally, this chapter includes a description of the data collection and analysis procedure. Chapters IV and V present the conclusions and discussion of the research results, respectively.

The final chapter contains conclusions and recommendations regarding research questions. Namely, there are recommendations for further research and practice.

**Conclusion**

This section described the context of the study. For a deeper understanding of the problem, background information, purposes and research questions are presented, as well as the importance of the research and its benefits. It has also outlined the structure of the thesis. The following chapter provides a literature review on the research theme. The third chapter is devoted to the research methodology. The fourth and fifth chapters present the results and discussion of the study. The last chapter establishes the summary and further recommendations for research and practice.

## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

The following chapter presents an overview of the existing literature related to my chosen topic. The scope of my research covers only short-term academic mobility programs, that exchange semesters spent at a foreign university under the Erasmus + program. Long-term international student mobility which includes studying abroad for completion degree has been excluded from the consideration of this study.

This review of the literature has been categorized into sub sections to provide the reader with an overview of the European Higher Education Area, Kazakhstani Higher Education, and the ERASMUS + Programme. This study focused on exploring the impact of study abroad on Kazakhstani students' academic expectation who studied under the short-term mobility program Erasmus +. In order to explore it, two research questions were formulated. They are how has the participation of Erasmus program changed the academic expectation of participants, and how participants have experienced academic life at their home institutions after their return.

This chapter starts with the discussion of main concepts of internationalization of higher education and its importance in the context of higher education. Then the second part is devoted to the concept of studying abroad, its importance, and the outcomes of a short-term academic mobility program on students. The third and fourth sections focus on the main motivations and reasons as well as the concerns and expectations of students to participate in short-term academic mobility programs. The next section reviews the impact of short-term academic mobility program on students, followed by the process of returning from study abroad and re-entry to their home countries institutions. Also, this part provides a description and conception of the reverse culture shock by different authors. The final section is devoted to a more detailed review of the short-term academic mobility program of Erasmus + not only in the context of Europe but also of Kazakhstan.

To sum up the literature, I have presented the conceptual framework which is the synthesis of the reviewed research on relevant literature and a guide for this research.

### **Internationalization of Higher Education**

The concept of internationalization varies depending on the authors' research and includes many aspects that will be considered further. Firstly, it is often said that improving the quality of knowledge can be achieved only through global cooperation. Internationalization is an integral part of global cooperation. According to Knight (2003) “internationalization at the national, sector, and institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education” (as cited in Yang, 2005, p.4). However, Sanyal and Johnstone (2011) apparently assume that higher education is at the crossroads of the world with important quantitative and qualitative changes that directly affect the economy and society as a whole for developing countries. According to Yang (2002) only with global cooperation it is possible to improve knowledge. At the same time Altbach and Teichler (2001) state that in order to improve knowledge and international cooperation universities should be internationalized. Also, according to them, universities should be international, as the goal is to improve knowledge and international cooperation (Altbach & Teichler, 2001). They argue that in the new era, higher education must strive for a new global system by promoting internationalization, as economic globalization and the academic system is inevitable (Altbach & Teichler, 2001). In sum, there is a direct relationship between HE and the international dimension. Internationalization includes global cooperation, internationalized universities and improved knowledge through the exchange of experiences between countries.

The issues related to the internationalization of higher education are examined from various aspects of the literature. For example, Teichler (2009) says that internationalization

is not short activity; instead, it is a consistent and continuous cross-border activity. While Bostrom (2010) identified internationalization from student exchange and says that the term refers to a strategy for creating global impacts which are different from the former use for student exchange and study abroad programs. Waters (2009) believes that partnership between universities and agreements between them is internationalization. Internships and international curricula relevant to all universities is another aspect that Jakson (2008) pointed. Leggott and Stapleford (2007) support the idea internationalized institution, in particular, they claim for those who do not have the opportunity to study abroad, they should be internationalized at home through the institution's internationalization strategy, curricula, multicultural atmosphere, and global vision. Otter (2007) also confirms that problems with the curriculum, the irrelevance and the limited knowledge and experience of the staff, and the limited institutional dedication or pushing factors contribute to the retardation of internationalization and the development of education. Thereby, several authors suggest that internationalization is a long process comprising student exchange, international programs, curricula and partnership.

In the global education market there are other aspects of internationalization. Internationalization, currently, is a justification of university success which works in accordance with international education standards and expectations (Tekin & Gencer, 2013). As Bostrom (2010) states, "Historically, internationalization was a term associated with specific international programs and student exchanges. Today, internationalization has a broader meaning related to strategic initiatives for global effectiveness" (Bostrom, 2010, p.143). The author means by these initiatives the strategic development of universities in relation to their work, policies and systems not only inside but also outside of it, which determine the nature of internationalization. Otter (2007) believes that at institutional level internationalization is determined by the appropriate conditions for

attracting foreign students. These are manifested in several dimensions: “distance education”, “franchise of education programs and degrees”, and a “global academic marketplace for students” (Altbach & Teichler, 2001, p.6), “joint degree programs” between universities in different places, “language course offerings”, and “international research projects” (Schwald, 2012, p.44), and “the exchange of cultures through teaching, research, and other services” (Yang, 2002, p.82). Consequently, the internationalization can be identified as a global education market for students where all its components are taken into account, namely strategic development, distance education, research, and other services.

To sum up, several authors suggest internationalization is a long process that includes improving the knowledge through global cooperation between universities and countries. Moreover, other authors argue that internationalization is a global education market for students which key aspects are internships and international curricula, distance education, franchise of education programs and degrees, joint degree programs, language courses, and international research projects.

### **Study Abroad**

Although the literature on internationalization refers to the different aspects that have been described above, study abroad programs are usually considered by the majority of studies. The study abroad is the theme of this section. Firstly, the definition of “study abroad” and its use in the context of this study are presented. Secondly, a review of the interaction between study abroad and internationalization is given. Finally, the importance of studying through short-term study abroad programs is presented.

According to Scwhald (2012), “study abroad are programs for those who want to spend one or more semesters abroad, maybe even want to get a degree at an international institution and there are other programs aimed at students who want to spend only a limited

number of days or weeks in an international environment” (p.45). Kitsantas (2004), defines study abroad programs as “all educational programmes that take place outside the geographical boundaries of the country of origin” (p.441).

Exchange programs comprise an important part of study abroad as well as internationalization. Andrews (2005) emphasizes that this is because they are related to the direct experience of developing international relations. A number of researchers (Zhang, Lu, T. Y., Hu, H., & Adler, 2010) have recently suggested that exchange programs have a significant influence on internationalization as these programs provide students with the opportunities to see the various styles in education and research of foreign countries. Although online learning communities also offer the experiences of international cooperation, Bryla (2015) believes that participation in study abroad seems to be more powerful and comprehensive than solely using educational technology. Accordingly, exchange educational programs play an essential role in the internationalization act, despite the fact that online learning is becoming increasingly popular.

Countries participating in study abroad have showed increased cultural awareness and competence of students (Roy et al., 2018). Teachers also point out the importance of expanding the educational environment for interacting with people from different cultures. Thus, increased attention to different cultures was the result of increasing the students’ number participate in short-term mobility programs (Roy et al., 2018). Some authors (Ayoun, Johnson, M. K., Vanhyfte, & O'Neill, 2010) have also suggested that after gaining international experience, courses representing international perspectives are more attractive to students. Also, Ileleji (2009) says that exchange program participants believe that new cultures are a new experience and new life. Additionally, the Krupnik and Krzaklewska (2007) concluded that international studying experience affects students in three dimensions - academic, career and social. In other words, studying abroad promotes the

development of intercultural relations, gives an opportunity to see different styles of teaching and explore other countries, gain a new life experience, and influence the academic, social and career aspects of students.

Short-term studying programs have pros and cons. Accessibility, short time frames and academic flexibility seem reasonable and safe for students, thus representing the advantages of short term study programs (Lewis & Niesenbaum, 2005). Also, short-term programs offer students the opportunity to expand their personality and develop sensitivity in intercultural aspect (Anderson, Lawton, Rexeisen, & Hubbard, 2006). In addition, the increased self-efficacy and improved communication skills with people from different cultures, and communication competence included in short-term programs (Milstein, 2005; Penington & Wildermuth, 2005; Rundstrom Williams, 2005). On the other hand, Pitts (2009) claims the disadvantages are that short-term programs do not fully provide the identical level of cultural immersion and the possibility of intercultural growth. Also, because of a shorter time, there is a difference between the adjustment process, the expansion of identity and intercultural growth for students of a short-term study rather than a long-term one (Pitts, 2009). Having considered the above mentioned, national governments and institutions of higher education encourage short-term international student mobility.

In sum, short-term study programs are becoming increasingly popular. Considering the prevailing advantages of these programs, many countries are striving to increase both the number of programs and the participating students. Also an important factor is that the majority of studies have shown both academic and cultural influence, as well as the social and personal impact on participants.

**Erasmus Program**

This part of the literature review is devoted to the history, conception and current situation of the Erasmus program in general as well as in Kazakhstan.

The vision of the European Council is to create a future competitive international community in which different social systems such as cultural, educational, political and other work together (ECDGEC 2010). Following this statement, the Erasmus program allows students to study for a limited time in host country and university. Thereby allowing them to develop professionally and personally, as well as enjoy life away from home (Lesjak, Juvan, Ineson, Yap, & Axelsson, 2015). Thus, the study of Erasmus is important for understanding the process of internationalization, its consequences, and results. Since Erasmus is a component of internationalization the objectives of the program coincide with the aspects of internationalization. Collaboration between higher education institutions and the introduction of innovative practices, improving the transparency and quality of education is one of the main objectives of the program (Erasmus, n.d.). The implementation and development of this program strengthened the modernization, quality and internationalization of the European higher education system (European Commission, 2012). As Yang (2002) noted, or a sufficient assessment, internationalization should be considered along with its components. Under the components, he suggests subgroups of study programs abroad. A number of authors (Vossensteyn, Lanzendorf, & Souto-Otero, 2008) have recognized the strong influence of Erasmus on the internationalization of teaching and learning. Bostrom (2010) also confirmed that the Bologna process and the Erasmus + have a significant impact on internationalization. In short, the goals and general significance of the Erasmus are directly interrelated with internationalization through transparency, cooperation, innovation and the improvement of the quality of education.

Erasmus is one of the best study programs in the world with a large coverage of students, countries and the universities with about 30 years of history (Lifelong Learning Program, 2014). Lifelong Learning Program (2014) reports that Erasmus (EuRoPeAn Community Action Scheme for or the MoBility of University Students [ERASMUS]) is the most excellent study abroad program with an average of 230,000 students per year from the EU and Iceland, Croatia, Norway, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, and Turkey. Since the start of the program in 1987, the total number of participants has reached about 3 million students, the involvement of 33 countries and about 4,000 HE institutions. The literature review shows that Erasmus was part of a larger program. In 2011 at the Brussels European Commission meeting the decision was made to simplify the structure of the program and to combine them all under the same name. According to European Union (2011) Erasmus was referred to as the Socrates I program (1994-98) & II (2000-06), the Lifelong Learning Program (2007-13) and ERASMUS + (2014-20) respectively. Now the Erasmus program works under the name Erasmus + until 2020. Universities in cooperating countries have a bilateral agreement for the exchange of students for one or two semesters in partner universities with grants from the EU Education Commission. For the distribution of grants, trainings, national agencies were established in each country. Teams located in universities under the supervision of national agency coordinators are responsible for signing bilateral agreements with other universities, students' selection process and other tasks (European Commission, 2012). In sum, Erasmus covers the countries of Europe and some partner countries. Cooperation is carried out through a bilateral agreement on the exchange of students.

Although the program was originally designed for European countries, Kazakhstani universities also have the right to participate in this program. According to the official website of the program, Kazakhstan participates in the program as a partner country in the

Central Asia region. What is more important, Kazakhstan became the first country in Central Asia to sign the Bologna Declaration in 2010 and become the 47th member of the European Higher Education Area (Seidahmetov, 2014). About 24 Kazakhstani universities take part in this program. In the context of my research, Erasmus will be used as an exchange program (outgoing student mobility) in higher education for one (six month) or two semesters under the name Erasmus + (beginning in 2014). Every year the program provides an opportunity for young people in Kazakhstan to study in the best European universities. According to the National Erasmus+ Office in Kazakhstan from 2015 to 2017, the total number of mobility grants in Kazakhstan was 2236 (629, 826, 781, respectively). At the same time, the total number of participants who left Kazakhstan for European countries amounted to 1,537, including 791 students and the rest of the administrative staff. The total amount of funding is 7,832,000 euros.

Due to the fact that Kazakhstan also has the right to cooperation in the framework of Erasmus, it is important to study the impact of Erasmus on Kazakhstani students in order to inform the overall process of internationalization in educational institutions.

### **Motivations of Students**

This section is devoted to the main motivations why students study abroad as well as their expectations.

According to the Lipic̆nik (1998) motivation to learn “is an inner process, action or a will which forces individual toward actions that satisfy their needs” (p. 154). This is an essential goal-oriented factor that predicts the advantages of people derived from studying. The student mobility push and pull framework is based on the determination of the nature or content of motivation (Lesjak et al., 2015).

The literature shows that the reasons/motivations for studying abroad are different regarding the Erasmus program. The research of Krupnik and Krzaklewska (2007), which

examined the main reasons of students and their rights in Europe during the exchange study, collected data from more than 12,000 Erasmus + students studying at European institutions. According to the findings, students are divided into two main groups in terms of their reasons to study. First group was experience-oriented students (53% of the sample) and second career-oriented students (47% of the sample). Experience oriented refers to gaining new experiences (academic, cultural and personal), learning different cultures, getting to know new people, being independent, living in a foreign country, and having fun. The study of Mirici, İlter, Saka, and Glover (2009), also confirms that the main reason for studying students in the Erasmus is to obtain new experiences in different fields of knowledge. However, they divide these objectives into three main groups: mobility, competencies, and understanding (see Table 1):

Table 1. *Erasmus exchange goals*

Category of aim	Sub-category
Mobility	adaptive, contrastive, or integrative education
Competencies	Future Employment
	formal study, qualifications, knowledge, and life skills
Understanding	people (self and others)
	change of outlook

*Source: Adapted from Educational exchanges and Erasmus intensive language courses: A case study for Turkish courses by Mirici et al., (2009). Eğitim Ve Bilim, 34(152), 148.*

*Retrieved from*

*<http://search.proquest.com.ezproxy.rit.edu/docview/1009842160?accountid=108>*

In addition, several studies (Ileleji, 2009; Teichler, 2004a; Tekin&Gencer, 2013) suggest that the participants of Erasmus recognize the program as a unique opportunity for a new experience. A number of authors have recognized the career oriented expectations as the main motive for studying students abroad. Career oriented expectations include improving academic knowledge, increasing prospects for further employment, and practicing a foreign language (Krupnik & Krzaklewska, 2007). Linking the reasons of students to their personality, they noted that students from Central and Eastern Europe who

were older women with a lower family income than the national average decided to participate in Erasmus based on career goals.

Another research that studied short-term academic mobility showed that the motivation of students to participate in the program relies on leisure travel motives. The authors studied 360 students from 26 European countries (Lesjak et al., 2015). The study revealed the main reasons which related to their needs in professional and personal growth. However, “infrastructure and image, and lifestyle and commercialization” consisted the main reasons for motivations of the major part of student depending on their personal and situational characteristics (Lesjak et al., 2015). Lesjak claims that due to the fact that ERASMUS + participants engage in shorter mobility periods than students seeking a full international degree, short-term study students are more focused on the direction of personal growth and other benefits rather than toward professional. The authors emphasize that this conclusion does not coincide with the original objectives of the Erasmus program. Namely, professional growth and development should be the main motives for the person involved in mobility. Thus, identifying yet another motive for students to participate in Erasmus, among others, will be important for elucidating the expectations and reasons for the participation of Kazakhstani students. As the literature review shows, the motives and expectations vary depending on the countries of the study, time duration, and participant's personal characteristics.

### **Concerns and Expectations of Students**

This section gives an overview of the students' concerns and expectations enrolled in short-term study abroad program. Special emphasis is placed on the review of academic concerns and expectations of students. Since they are directly related to the research question.

According to Burgoon and Walther (1990) expectation can be defined as “an enduring pattern of anticipated behavior that may be either generalized or person specific” (p. 235). The students' academic expectations in this study are considered the following points:

- understanding in a new country if English is not the main language;
- the distinction of academic systems;
- the difference in teaching methods in the new institution;
- the difference in the communication style with faculty and peers;
- the difference in performance and satisfaction with learning (Bell, 2016).

“Expectation Violation Theory (EVT)” by Burgoon (1978) is designed to explain people's reactions to unexpected communication, focusing on both non-verbal and verbal behavior. According to this theory, expectations are derived from the communicator, relationship and contextual characteristics (cultural and situational). It also includes social and cultural norms and values based on past experience (Burgoon and Walther, 1990). However, later, Burgoon, (1995) argue that not all cultures share the same norms, rules, and expectations. Thus, they are easily violated due to lack of understanding. Burgoon et al. (1995) claim that “The greater the negative variation uncertainty, anxiety, and disillusionment. Similarly, positive interactions lead to more favorable outcomes” (as cited in Bell, 2016, p.198). The differences in cultures, customs, training and style can create the potential for uncertainty, negative expectations and dissatisfaction in further education in a “foreign” country. Thus, this theory is most suitable for explaining students' expectations. It is especially important in the study of short-term academic mobility programs for students since it considers the influence of different cultures and countries on individual expectations.

Currently, the number of students studying abroad is relatively higher than before. With high expectations, they study in a short period of time (from two weeks to one semester). However, there is a gap between the reality and expectations (Pitts, 2009). Students' expectations are a key element to address the issue of studying abroad. The expectations, the adjustment process and the impact are important aspects for studying abroad (Pitts, 2005; Goldstein & R. Kim, 2006; R. Kim & Goldstein, 2005). Some studies have proven that the expectations between students, study programs and academic staff have a direct impact on the general learning experience (Kingston & Forland, 2008; Vande Berg, 2007). According to Martin & Rohrllich study (1991) students' expectations were associated with pre-departure concerns and gender, previous travel experience and location. For example, less stress, high satisfaction, and easier adaptation process were noted by those who had positive expectations and positive previous experience abroad (Kealey, 1989; Martin, 1987; Rohrllich & Martin, 1991). Thus, for a better and more thorough understanding of the effect of short-term studies abroad on Kazakhstani students, it is necessary to begin by studying their expectations. As expectations are directly related to the whole learning process and affect all aspects.

Some research has been conducted regarding student expectations. One of the newest studies in this area is Pitt's research (2009). The study by Pitts divided students' expectations into the following categories: "Academic / language expectations", "Social expectations", "Culture / value expectation", and "Travel / cultural experience expectations" (p.453-454). According to this study, the gap between academic expectations and abroad experience was observed after returning. For example, students before arriving in France expected improvement in the French language through its widespread use in classrooms. However, the shock was the realization that even French students had difficulty communicating in French. Another example is that students believed their

success in non-linguistic classes. It was expected that classes will be easier and they will have fewer responsibilities. However, after several days of study, they found that classes similar to those in their home university. Additionally, this study provides the following groups of sources of expectations. Such as “Host University”, “Co-students”, “Friends / family at Home”, “Host Family”. “Home university” (p.455-456). Data from interviews with 127 students - former participants in short academic mobility programs are the result of a comparative analysis of presented study. Many students have marked their own expectations as a mix with information received from media, traveler stories, and textbook presentations. However, the overwhelming majority indicated that their expectations were related to external sources. Thus, the expectations of students are studied for a long time and there is some research devoted to this issue. However, the issues of changing students’ academic expectations, the gap between expectations have not been studied enough, especially in the context of Kazakhstani students.

Studying the concerns of students as well as expectations is a significant factor in determining the impact of student decisions on studying abroad (Bell, 2016). Various scholars suggest the following factors that relate to student concerns. Findlay et al. (2006) suppose that financial difficulties affect students' decision making. While Klahr and Ratti (2000) define “academic prerequisites and qualifications for the foreign university that students either do not understand or do not meet, differences in academic year structures, a lack of foreign language skills, information on local living conditions and knowledge about local accommodation” (as cited in Bell, 2016, p. 198). According to Matthews et al. (1998) lack of support from faculty members and staff at home university, especially academic consultants, and a lack of information belong to another concerns of students. These problems are not common to all students everywhere, but vary among them. For example, learning a foreign language can be a barrier for some but for others a motivation (Nilsson,

2014). Lillyman and Bennett (2014) propose to solve or overcome these problems by informing students, thorough preparation and planning for study abroad and guidance of this process. Thus, various studies have identified the concerns of students. Among them are financial difficulties, differences in the structure of academic programs and learning processes, insufficient knowledge of a foreign language, and a lack of information about local life conditions. Other expectations also include the lack of support from the home university (faculty, staff) and the lack of information on the program.

### **Impacts of Study Abroad**

The literature review shows that researchers have identified different types of influence of the Erasmus program on students. However, in my literary review I focus on the academic impact of Erasmus since it correlates with the research objectives.

In general, the literature review shows that studying abroad has a largely positive impact. For instance, studying abroad has a wide and long-lasting impact on the students' lives (Paige, Fry, Stallman, Jon, & Josić, 2010). Participating in study abroad programs increases self-confidence, leadership and problem-solving skills, and facilitates openness (Black and Duhon, 2006; Ingraham and Peterson, 2004; Sachau et al., 2010). The positive impact on the early stages of career development, competitive advantage when looking for work, preparing students for the global environment are also aspects of the impact of the study abroad (Mor-Barak, 2013; Peacock, 2005; Potts, 2015). Also, the Bryla study (2015) has been examined students from Poland who studied under the Erasmus program of short-term academic mobility. This study showed the following advantages: "improving their foreign language skills, making international friends, enhancing their intercultural understanding, becoming more mobile, independent, self-confident, and feeling more European (an identity effect)" (p.2074). At the same time, the majority of respondents noted the highest level of satisfaction with the program and recommend this program to

their friends. Therefore, from a Polish point of view student participation in Erasmus is an attractive and essential educational technology. Due to political circumstances, Poland participates in the program with some delay, but, the growth dynamics persist. Thus, it can be seen that the general impact of studying abroad and the Erasmus program overlap for the most part. However, the academic influence was not clearly identified. The information about the experience of students from other countries is not universally presented. That does not allow judging the widespread positive impact of the program even on Kazakhstani students.

After studying various research of students' perception about the Erasmus impact a study by Ünal (2013) classifies these impacts as follows: individual, academic, social, language, and cultural. It is interesting to note that these impacts are similar to the motives for participating in Erasmus and the program expectations. Usually, the pros and program impacts are classified in such dimensions as personal, academic, cultural, and language. The major segmentation is academic impact including language impacts and changes in learning expectations, and social ones that involve individual and cultural impacts. But Ünal (2013) states that consequences are interrelated and personal benefits can affect the academic aspect, or cultural influences affect the personal. In the same way a study by Goodman and Berdan (2013) showed that even if cultural and personal benefits are the major motivations for participation in the program, for students' participation should not be viewed as a separate activity from education. The authors noted that an obligatory element of the curriculum should be education abroad with a view to internationalize student learning. The study by Demir and Demir (2009) came to similar conclusion. For instance, according to this study the participants of Erasmus through the experience of obtaining education in different countries reported to have improved their critical thinking. Although the authors related this impact as personal, the formation of critical thinking can

also be useful for academic purposes. The authors also stated that the participants improved their academic achievements by developing their language, gaining confidence in their career and even in learning a second language (Demir & Demir (2009). Moreover, the academic impact of the program has been studied by Özdem (2013). In particular, the research by Özdem (2013) qualitatively studied the 24 former participants of Erasmus. According to the study, the majority of participants confirmed the program advantageous in terms of academic success. Recent research (Roy et al., 2018) that studied short-term mobility programs identifies improved academic impact in a group of personal results along with moral and ethical issues understanding. Also, Luo and Jamieson-Drake (as cited in Roy et al., 2018) confirm that participants of short academic mobility increased academic success along with communication skills and above-mentioned understanding.

Overall, the impact of the study abroad has been studied by many researchers. It is generally agreed that the study abroad is an effective approach in obtaining students' new experience and knowledge. However, there is a shortage of research that has studied the academic impact of short-term study programs. In particular, there is also a shortage of studying the short-term Erasmus+ mobility program. Besides, these studies were conducted in the context of the European Region, while the data for Kazakhstan are limited. Therefore, there is a need to fill this gap by studying the academic influence of Erasmus on Kazakhstani students.

### **Returning from Study Abroad and Re-entry**

This section is devoted to the literature review about the concept of re-entry, academic experience after study abroad and the phenomenon of reverse culture shock by different authors.

The literature review shows that about 150 studies of the re-entry process were conducted. Researchers highlight various aspects of this process. In particular, Szkudlarek

(2010) noted that the studies are mostly fragmented because they point to various aspects. Besides, he claims that a review of the literature about re-entry is more descriptive. Citron (1996) stated that personal relationships based on problems with re-entry are sufficiently studied. Another author studied the process of returning students. In his study Cohen (2003) pointed out the number of studies devoted to re-entry shock is limited, and even fewer studies are devoted to returnee students. Some studies consider the academic aspects of re-entry through empirical studies. Fichtner (1988) revealed that Japanese students after returning to their homeland did not experience great difficulties with social or general return, but noted difficulties in academic return. The Gaw study (2000) studied 66 students from American colleges who completed secondary school education abroad and returned to the United States. They also noted academic problems, including adaptation to college, academic performance, test anxiety, and trouble studying. A study by Wielkiewicz and Turkowski (2010) showed that returnee students noted an increase in their course and volume of homework. However, over time students less indicate the academic aspect as the main problem. Some studies have studied the academic aspect of re-entry (Fichtner, 1988; Gaw, 2000; Sussman, 1986; Şahin, 1990), but studies that note academic problems as part of the re-entry process are still small. Gaw (2000) also noted that academic problems faced by students on their return are still not clear. Previous studies have researched the process of return and culture shock of students. However, studies related to Kazakhstan's re-entry issues (academic aspect) are limited, especially related to the short-term programs. Thus, re-entry problems of Kazakhstani students remain the existing gap in the literature.

Another important term is the shock experienced by students upon returning home. According to the Thompson & Christofi (2006), the process after returning home is called re-entry or reverse culture shock. Re-entry shock can occur in four dimensions – interpersonal, physical, personal, and cultural (Citron, 1996). Storti (2001) stated that the

returnee represents a minority, since now he sees many events differently from the rest of society. He also pointed out that re-entry shock can lead to some physical illnesses, for example lack of appetite and flu. Similarly, Cohen (2003) argues that the re-entry shock can be the cause of a serious depression that requires medical treatment as well as the cause of anxiety, lack of understanding from relatives and friends, lifestyles change. Gaw (2000) stated that this shock can cause a need for help. Gaw observes that although students experience a high-level reverse culture shock, they do not generally seek professional help. In recent years researchers have identified some factors affecting the re-entry shock. Szkudlarek (2010) stated that readjustment is more difficult if the gap increases between home and host culture. Cohen (2003) studied nine female students studying in France and returned to the UK. According to his findings, the following reasons affect the level of re-entry shock, such as gender, age, culture, time spent abroad, previous personal, host country experience, previously similar abroad experience, and keeping in touch with the home culture. The conclusions of Cohen confirm that relatives and friends underestimating re-entry problems can cause problems with adaptation in returnees. In short, another difficulty for returnees is the lack of understanding from relatives and friends. In sum, reverse culture shock is an important part of the return process leading to serious health problems if not addressed.

A series of studies has indicated who is affected by the process of re-entry except for those who have returned. For instance, Szkudlarek (2010) emphasizes that the re-entry concept is important not only for those who returned, but also for persons who manage the return of returnees. In Cohen's (2003) and Szkudlarek's (2010) view the re-entry process can be difficult for the following groups of people: international company employees, spouses and children, and students. Martin, (1986) notes siblings, families, and friends are also considered to be involved in this process. Moreover, some studies noted various

measures to create the most favorable conditions and support the returnees. Due to the fact that a return to home culture is definitely not easy, especially if the experience was defined as “life change” (Thompson & Christofi, 2006). It is important to study the measures that may be taken by all stakeholders. As stated by Cohen (2003) and Szkudlarek (2010), repatriates can create a positive impact on the environment in which they returned if the return process is properly established. He stated that support practice is not usually considered or is a preliminary proposal than the final one. Isogai, Hayashi, and Uno (1999) indicated that ensuring an appropriate environment and the opportunity to come together for returnees as an important measure. They also note that the directions of the training can be language, educational information, and value. As another solution, the use of the same methods used for adaptation to the host country (Tips for re-entry, n. d.). Additionally, some suggestions were put forward by the authors to solve the problem of reentry shock of returnees.

The following solutions are designed to reduce the effect of re-entry shock:

- listening to other people's experiences (Tips for re-entry, n. d.);
- talking and sharing experiences with others who have returned from abroad

(Brack, n. D.);

- exchange of experience in focus groups Wielkiewicz and Turkowski (2010);
- discussion groups for returnees Gaw (2000).

Thus, in order for the process of studying abroad to have a positive effect on all, it is necessary to properly set up the return process through the involvement and work of all stakeholders, creating favorable conditions for returnees, sharing experiences and ideas.

To sum up, significant changes are more typical for long-term foreign programs than short-term ones (as cited in Mapp, 2012). Therefore, it may seem that due to the limited amount of data on the process of return and adaptation for short-term programs this

may not be significant. We can confirm that some aspects can be adapted to short-term programs. However, this statement cannot be universal. Besides, the constant increase in the popularity and number of participants in short-term programs it still does not allow us to make sufficiently reliable data as for long-term ones (as cited in Mapp, 2012).

Therefore, short-term programs also have their own characteristics and aspects of re-entry, which undoubtedly need to be studied in order to find out how relevant this is for both short-term and long-term programs.

In addition, the Erasmus program addresses this problem as part of the concept of internationalization. The willingness to return and overcome shock among students becomes much more important than the benefits of the Erasmus +. Therefore, a study that focuses on the academic aspect of re-entry for Kazakhstani students can fill a gap in the literature for the short-term program re-entry concept.

### **Conceptual Framework**

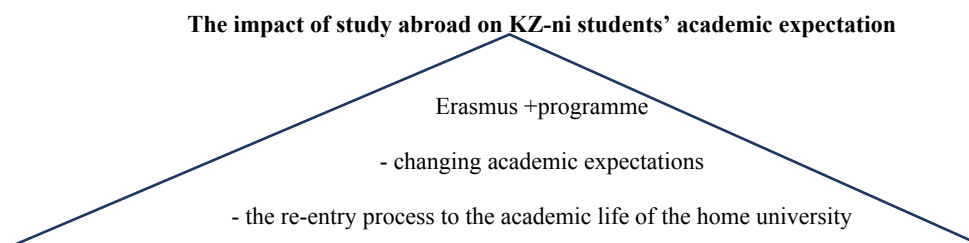
This section presents the result of an analysis of the conceptual framework, which is the unified and consistent concept of the reviewed literature. The central part of this model is “The impact of study abroad on Kazakhstani students’ academic expectation”. To which all of the following interrelated concepts apply (See Figure 1). The lower part of the figure shows the key aspects of this conceptual framework, namely the Erasmus + program; the changing academic expectations; the re-entry process to the academic life of the home university.








Firstly, the lower highlighted categories are key ideas. Which represent a sequential chain from the process of internationalization to the process of returning home. Due to the fact that the process of studying abroad includes the general concept of internationalization from which the following aspects further depart. First of all, these are advantages that considerably surpass the disadvantages. Further, the main motivations of students are

divided into three main groups "experience and career-oriented students" (Krupnik & Krzaklewska, 2007), "mobility, competencies, and understanding" (Mirici et al., 2009), and "leisure travel motives." (Lesjak et al., 2015). Also students' concerns and expectations, special attention is paid to the academic one. The next is the academic impact of short-term study abroad on students. Finally, the process of returning to home university is divided into two categories as problems of re-entry shock, and the main stakeholders.

Secondly, each category is divided into sub-concepts that represent its key ideas. It also includes the main stakeholders, characteristics, types, and concepts involved in this process.

Finally, the definition of expectation is based on the one proposed by Burgoon (1978), which refers to "Expectation Violation Theory (EVT)". In particular, it explains personality expectations based on three factors: the communicator, relationship and contextual characteristics (cultural and situational). However, later Burgoon, (1995) supplemented his theory by explaining that not all cultures have the same norms and expectations. Thus, the more negative expectations, the worse the result. Similarly, positive interactions result in a favorable outcome. Therefore, this theory is most suitable for explaining students' expectations. As in the study of short-term programs of academic mobility, it is important to take into account the difference between cultures and countries on individual.



<b>Internationalization</b> 	<b>Study abroad</b> 	<b>Motivations of Students</b> 	<b>Concerns and Expectations of Students</b> 		<b>Impact of Study Abroad</b> 	<b>Returning from Study Abroad or Re-entry</b> 
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Global cooperation (Yang, 2002);</li> <li>- Internationalized universities (Altbach &amp; Teichler, 2001);</li> <li>- Student exchange and international programs (Bostrom, 2010);</li> <li>- a global academic marketplace for students (Altbach and Teichler, 2001);</li> <li>- joint degree programs and international research</li> </ul>	<p><b>Pros (+)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- academic flexibility, short time frames (Lewis &amp; Niesenbaum, 2005);</li> <li>- expanding the students' personality; developing intercultural sensitivity (Anderson et al., 2006);</li> <li>- self-efficacy, communication skills competence (Milstein, 2005; Penington &amp; Wildermuth, 2005;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- experience and career oriented students (Krupnik &amp; Krzaklewska, 2007);</li> <li>- mobility, competencies, and understanding (Mirici et al., 2009);</li> <li>- leisure travel motives ("infrastructure and image, and lifestyle and commercialization"). (Lesjak et al., 2015).</li> </ul>	<p>“Expectation Violation Theory (EVT)” Burgoon, 1978.</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div>		<p>the influence in students' academic, social and career dimensions (Krupnik &amp; Krzaklewska study, 2007)</p> <p>Individual impacts, <b>Academic impacts</b>, Social impacts, Language impacts, Cultural impacts (Ünal, 2013)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the re-entry culture shock (Cohen, 2003); the Re-entry or reverse culture shock (Thompson &amp; Christofi, 2006);</li> <li>- difficulties in academic return (Fichtner, 1988) (Gaw, 2000);</li> <li>- an increase in the course and volume of homework; (Wielkiewicz &amp; Turkowski, 2010)</li> </ul>
			<p><b>Expectations of Students</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The gap between expectations and the reality</li> </ul>	<p><b>Concerns of Students</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- financial difficulties (Findlay et al., 2006);</li> </ul>	<p><b>Academic impact</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-language impacts and changes in learning expectations, and social (Ünal, 2013);</li> </ul>	<p><b>Problems of re-entry shock-</b></p> <p>Cause of anxiety, depression, lack of understanding from</p>

<p>projects (Schwald, 2012); - the exchange of cultures through teaching, research, and other services (Yang, 2002).</p>	<p>Rundstrom Williams, 2005). <b>Cons (-)</b> - the difference between the process of adjustment, the expansion of identity and intercultural growth for students (Pitts, 2009).</p>		<p>(Pitts, 2009); <b>- types of expectations</b> “Academic / language expectations”, “Social expectations”, “Culture / value expectation”, and “Travel / cultural experience expectations”; <b>- sources of expectations-</b> “Host University”, “Co-students”, “Friends / family at Home”, “Host Family”. “Home university” (Pitts, 2009).</p>	<p>- “academic prerequisites; -differences in academic year structures, a lack of foreign language skills, information on local living conditions” (Klahr &amp; Ratti, 2000) - lack of support from faculty and staff at home university, lack of information (Matthews et al.,1998).</p>	<p>- critical thinking; native language, gaining confidence in their profession (Demir &amp; Demir, 2009); - success at the university and being critical of the home institution (Cammelli, 2001 and Özdem, 2013); - academic success along with communication skills and moral and ethical issues (Roy et al., 2018).</p>	<p>relatives and friends, change of lifestyles (Cohen, 2003)  <b>Who involved in this problem –</b> spouses and children, international company employees, and students (Cohen, 2003); Szkudlarek, 2010) -siblings, families, and friends (Martin, 1986)</p>
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Figure 1. Conceptual framework

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to review the results of various studies regarding the impact of short-term study abroad, academic expectations, and the process of returning to the academic life of a home university. The chapter began with a review of the internationalization process through mobility programs, Erasmus +, and study abroad. This was followed by the students' motivations, expectations, and concerns about studying abroad. Then this section described the academic impact of studying abroad, the process of return, and finally the conceptual framework.

### **Chapter III: Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

The aim of this chapter is to present the methodology of the study used. Also, I justify my choice of qualitative approach and case study strategy based on the semi-structured interview. The chapter consists of six sections. The first section provides the rationale for the research design that is used in this study. The second section describes the research sampling procedures and sample. The following section illustrates current research methods. The fourth section includes a rationale for the data analysis approach. Finally, the last sections describe the limitations and ethical study considerations.

#### **Research Design**

In this section I will explain the study approach, special design strategy, namely case study. Also, I will describe the research process.

Since the results of the study depend on participants' feelings, expressions and ideas, evaluating them is not easy using standard survey questions. According to Walliman (2011), "data that is descriptive by its nature, such as ideas, customs, and beliefs, are measured in a qualitative way" (p. 72-73). In addition, Mertler and Charles (2011) stated that the qualitative research is primarily focused on the "quality of a particular activity and not how often it occurs or how it might be typically the focus of quantitative research (p. 192)". Thus, in the course of this project, a qualitative method of research is proposed.

A case study design was chosen because the main thrust of a case study can be descriptive, explanatory or exploratory (Yin, 1984). The reason for choosing the design of the case study is that the focus is on studying a particular discourse or aspect for a more fruitful and meaningful study than giving vague generalizations (Yin, 1984). Stake (2005) classified three types of case studies such as an intrinsic, instrumental, and a multiple case study. My research relates to the instrumental type since the case will be considered in depth and will be used for advance understanding. Bogdan and Biklen define a case study

as “a detailed examination of one setting, or one single subject, or one single depository of documents, or one particular event” (2003, p. 111). Reflecting on their definition, I located my case in the understanding of Kazakhstani bachelor students who studied in Europe under the Erasmus program. More specifically, this strategy is used to understand students' ideas. It is a case study that is bounded by its focus on a specific group – Kazakhstani undergraduate and specific studentsregion-related experiences in one state university.

The qualitative method allows an understanding of rich and in-depth information about the events and experiences of program participants, the underlying structures, relationships among entities. One-to-one, semi-structured interviews are the tool used to elicit these deep perspectives and information. For consistency with literature and study, questions are formed on the basis of literature, similar studies and the goals of my research.

Semi-structured interviews consist of a set of questions (which address the research question / s) but provide flexibility. They encourage the researcher to regulate the interview, that is, to reject, delete or add questions for clarification or development. This type of interview is designed as a regular conversation, not a formal question and an exchange between the researcher and the interview participants. (Glesne, 2011).

### **Research Site and Sampling**

In this section, I will present the study's research site. The procedure for selecting study participants is also described. In addition, this section contains brief background data about the participants in the study.

Although the preferred choice of sampling strategy is purposive sampling, it was difficult to execute the strategy because a list of targeted students was not available. As a result, I used convenience sampling to select participants. Since the “convenience sampling procedure” (Cooksey & McDonald, p. 470) is used in the selection of study participants because of the easy access of the researcher to participants and their willingness to

participate in the study. Also advantages for my research were the availability of students, and the quickness with which data were collected for analysis (Kivunja, 2015). The participants were recruited through the following venues: inquiring students on campus and asked if they participated in the Erasmus + program, and asking students at the dorms the same question. In addition, I also asked former students, colleagues who worked at the universities, and other acquaintances if they knew of any former Erasmus participants who might be interested in granting me a meeting. During conversation with students I explained the aim and the procedures of my study including the ethical considerations. It is worth noting that some students did not want to take part in the interview. However, ten students became interested and agreed to participate in the interview. Then we exchanged e-mails in order to agree on the place and time of the interview. Each study participant received a copy, made familiar and signed the informed Consent Form (Appendix A).

The sample for this study is students from a leading state university in cosmopolitan Kazakhstan. For the interview, ten former Erasmus students (bachelors) from different courses and specialties were selected. In order to obtain insightful qualitative data through qualitative methods, the number of participants in the sample group is sufficient. A similar qualitative study of the Erasmus program also has a similar number of students as a sample (Cohen, 2003).

There are various reasons for choosing students from this university. First, this university is one of the major coordinators of the project Erasmus +. International cooperation of the University is carried out on the basis of more than 30 agreements with universities and research organizations of more than 15 countries and around 200 mobility programs (data since 2015). Within the framework of these agreements, meetings, round tables, conferences, guest lectures of foreign lecturers and other events are held annually. Second, the university has a sufficient number of participants in outgoing Erasmus +

program (including around 70 students, and more than 60 faculty and administrative staff). Third, it is one of the most reputable among the universities of Kazakhstan. Having considered the above reasons, it can be said that the university has considerable experience with the program. Therefore, the sample chosen from this research site could be considered a proper sample in terms of the Erasmus + experience.

To collect data, I first obtained ethical approval from the review board of either Nazarbayev University Graduate School of Education Committee. Qualitative data collection involved in-depth, one-to-one interviews in English or Russian. I conducted an experimental interview with one of the students as a pilot study.

The selected participants are university students of different specialties who have studied during one semester in European universities under the Erasmus + program (see Table 2).

Table 2. *Participants of the study*

Participant (by pseudonym)	Gender	Course of study	Country of study	Specialization	English language proficiency level
Student 1	male	3	Spain	Humanities	B2
Student 2	male	4	Romania	Engineering	C1
Student 3	female	4	Spain	Humanities	C1
Student 4	female	3	Romania	Humanities	B2
Student 5	female	4	Spain	Humanities	C1
Student 6	female	4	France	Humanities	B2
Student 7	female	4	Turkey	Engineering	B2
Student 8	female	3	Czech Republic	Humanities	B2
Student 9	male	3	Czech Republic	Humanities	B2
Student 10	male	4	Poland	Humanities	B2

In total ten students, four males, six females, participated in the study. As mentioned above the main criterion was the Erasmus + academic mobility program's participants. I also tried to gather students from different specialties and those who studied

in various European countries. English proficiency is generally high. Some participants besides English know other foreign languages at a fairly good level.

### **Research Methods**

This section is devoted to the description and justification of my research methods for collecting research data. Also, the section presents the process of planning, piloting and interviewing.

As mentioned above, I conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews with ten students from one university who studied under the Erasmus program of academic mobility in Europe during one semester.

Firstly, I developed the research problem, further the purpose and research questions. All these parts are interdependent and work to achieve the goal and solve the research problem. Secondly, I developed data collection instruments that are based on research questions. I developed an interview protocol of 18 questions (Appendix B). As soon as my protocol was approved by the supervisor, I conducted one pilot interview to check the accuracy and timing. The pilot interview was conducted with a former Erasmus student at another university. The goals of pilot studies were summarized up by Sarantakos (2005), e.g. "to estimate the costs and duration of the main study" (p. 256), "to test the suitability of the research methods and instruments" (p. 256), and "to familiarize researchers with the research environment" (p. 256). However, for me, the purpose of the pilot study is "to discover possible weaknesses, inadequacies, ambiguities and problems in all aspects of the research, so that they can be corrected before actual data collection takes place" (p. 256). In fact, after a pilot interview, I discovered the inadequacy of some of my sample questions since the interviewee asked additional explanations and clarifications on some questions. After that, I made an adjustment and changed some questions. A number

of questions were also added so that participants could fully participate in the conversation. However, the pilot interview is not included in my final thesis.

The duration of the real interview with participants was approximately 40-60 minutes. The shortest interview took about 30 minutes, the longest took 60 minutes to complete. Each interview began with an introduction and explanation of the study, its procedures and ethics. The Consent Forms were also signed and provided copies to the interview participants. Half of the interviews were conducted in a comfortable atmosphere inside the university, three were conducted via Skype/WhatsApp call. And two was conducted through written answers to questions via e-mail, as participants could not get in touch due to being abroad. Interviews conducted at the university, via Skype and WhatsApp call were recorded with the consent of the participants. Certainly, I noticed some small differences in the interview depending on the place of its passage. For instance, the face to face and via Skype/WhatsApp interviews almost did not differ from each other. In the beginning, there was some discomfort, but as the interview progressed, the discomfort passed. For my study, live communication seemed to be the most productive because it was possible to immediately clarify the answers to questions, as well as ask additional questions. Therefore, I think that live interviews are more informative and complete. Unfortunately, the disadvantage of interviews via e-mail is the inability of the interviewer to immediately clarify the answers. Only after analyzing the interview I asked additional questions to the participants, re-sending them to the e-mails. However, due to the small number of such interviews, namely two, the difference in the overall picture after the analyses of all the interviews was not strongly felt.

As mentioned above the semi-structured interviews was chosen since they represent both closed- and open-ended questions that will allow for a conversation between the interviewer and interviewees. In the interview, I asked about students' views on the

program, the contribution to their development and the problems they encountered during the participation. The interview questions consist of three parts. The first part includes questions about the experience before Erasmus (participation requirements, the academic satisfaction level at the home institution, and the motive to participate). The second part is about Erasmus + experience (academic life abroad). The third part is mainly on adaptation problems, academic impact, and academic expectations of students.

### **Data Analysis Approach**

In the section above, I described the methods I used to collect data. In this section, I will present the data analysis process for this study.

Several steps were taken in analyzing qualitative data. The data and findings were analyzed based on the literature review and study objectives. The findings of the literature and the themes that students addressed during the interviews based on their personal experience grouped under the study aims themes.

Five personal interviews were recorded on my phone recorder. Next, I transferred the file to an mp3 and uploaded it to the laptop. Then I transcribed each of the interviews. For the analysis of the interview, I used thematic coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After completing the transcription, I carefully read each interview to get a general idea of the information. Then the coding process began on general topics related to the categories that exist in my research questions. However, in the course of coding, topics appeared that I did not expect. These categories are presented in Coding Schema (see Appendix C).

All categories were further analyzed in order to develop my statement of Findings (see Findings in page 43). For instance, my second finding stated that the main motivation of students to participate in Erasmus was academic experience. This finding is developed using the “Motivations of students” categories (please see Appendix C).

In other words, the results of qualitative data or the ideas of interviewees about the Erasmus program were analyzed by thematic linking to literature and research objectives. After the interview, themes were identified and grouped. Each theme has been analyzed in detail.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This section presents ethical considerations that describe the process of anonymity and confidentiality of participants and data collected during the study.

Once I developed the proposal for my research, I used that information to prepare the NUGSE Ethics Form. On this form, I described the study's aim, the research problem, the research questions, and research instruments as well. I also provided information on protecting the participants' anonymity and confidentiality of the research. This research was granted approval from NUGSE Research Committee in October 12, 2018.

An important part of the ethics review process was my Consent Form where the purpose and benefits of participating in the study were described as well as research methods, interview dates, confidentiality guarantee, and my and supervisor's contact information. Prior to the interview, the Consent Form was approved by my supervisor. After acquaintance with the interview participants, their oral consent to the interview was obtained. Further, the time, date and place of the interview were discussed. I made a schedule in which I indicated the participants' data, the date, time and place of the interview.

Each interview began with gratitude for participating, and explanations about the protection of the names and data of the participants. Each participant received a hard copy of my and the participant's signature. All transcripts, notes, and audiotapes were stored in a laptop under the security code.

In order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of the data, I coded the names of the participants by assigning a special number to each student (for example, "Student 1", "Student 2", etc ....). In addition, the decoding of the numbers is known by me only. Moreover, I did not mention the name and location of the university in any part of my thesis. Also, the participants' specialties were summarized and divided into two categories: humanities and engineering. The meeting and data schedule mentioned above has been destroyed. I deleted all the recorded audio data as soon as I finished analyzing them.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The generalization of results has some limitations. The study was conducted with 10 former participants of the Erasmus + program. Although this amount is proper for qualitative research, a larger amount will help to draw more comprehensive findings. Also, the vast majority of students participated were representatives from the humanities whereas students from other specialties could feel the impact of the program differently. Additionally, the study evaluated the impact of the Erasmus + on students that are studying in one university. Students at other universities might have a different opinion about the program.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter provided information about the research methodology, including the choice of research design, sampling, instruments, the process of data collection, and analyses. My choice was justified and explained using literature. The last section was dedicated to the limitations of the study as well as the ethical considerations and the procedures of ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. All information described in this chapter was the basis for discussion in the next chapter, Findings.

## Chapter IV: Findings

### Introduction

In this chapter, I will present the main findings from ten in-depth interviews. The participants of the study included bachelor students from a leading state university. The study aims to explore the impact of study abroad on Kazakhstani students' academic expectation who studied under the short-term academic mobility program Erasmus +. In order to explore it, two research questions were formulated: 1) how has the participation of the Erasmus program changed the academic expectation of participants? 2) how have participants experienced academic life at their home institutions after their return?

### Findings

Ten former Erasmus students participated in the interview. Among them were four males and six females. All participants are currently 3rd year and 4th year bachelor's students. Most of the participants were Human sciences students and only two were Engineering students.

Regarding the countries in which the students carried out their overseas education, three students studied in Spain, two in Romania and the Czech Republic, and remaining in France, Turkey, and Poland, respectively (see Figure 2).

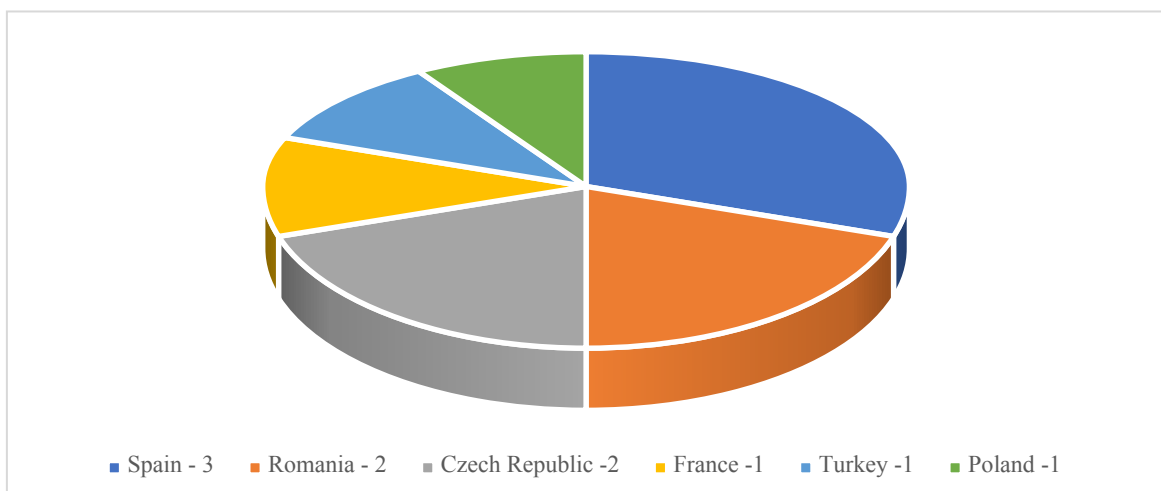


Figure 2. Countries the students studied

All students participated in Erasmus during the academic year 2017-18, therefore the experiences they shared are recent and relevant. However, almost all participants noted that they did not remember all the details of their studies upon their return as all the details were no longer fresh in their minds at the time of my research. As a matter of fact, as Student 6 stated, “To be honest, I do not really remember the whole process, but I will tell approximately” (personal communication, December 5, 2018). Also, I did not notice the difference between the responses of men and women.

### Motivations of Students

The reasons for the students’ participating in Erasmus+ included academic experience as any work experience obtained in an academic environment, broadening personal experience through life abroad, language level improvement, traveling and cultural experience (see Figure 3). Along with growth through academic experience, nine students also noted the desire to experience life abroad, eight students mentioned their willingness to improve the language skills, seven said they wanted to travel during their studies and six were happy to get the opportunity of cultural experience.

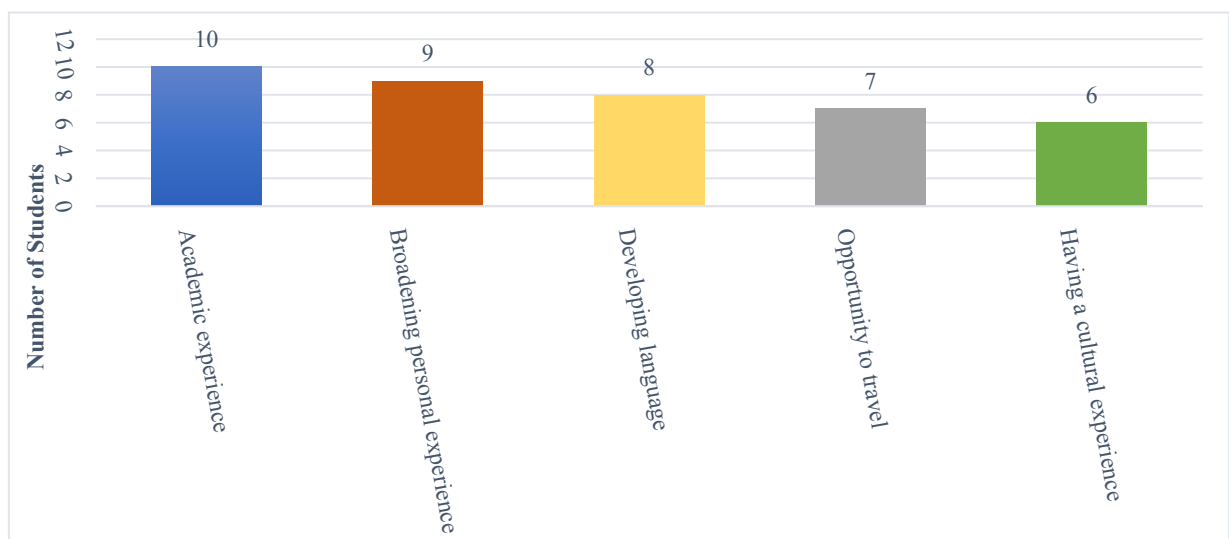


Figure 3. Reasons for students' participation in the Erasmus+

However, all students indicated academic expectations are among the first priorities. This was born out by all students who mentioned most of their time at the host universities was spent on academic study. They could be engaged in non-academic activities only in their free time. Thus, as Student 2 explained:

“One of the main reasons was to experience European education. In my home university we do not have any right to choose subjects that we wish to learn, but there, people study what they find interesting. Secondly, luckily in UAIC professorial staff is very strong, they have strong background working in industries and in several countries. For example, machine learning professor worked for 20 years in ML & AI field in France and Germany. Even TA’s are very powerful. While working in university, they also work in big tech companies, and help students to get a job” (personal communication, November 27, 2018).

Another participant (Student 8) claimed academic reason as the main reason for participating in the program:

“I participated in Erasmus because I wanted to understand the academic system at a foreign university in order to prepare for my future studies abroad. I also needed to improve my knowledge of English through lessons and communication with international students” (personal communication, December 12, 2018).

For responders, the Erasmus program is more about having a study experience than an experience travelling. The reason for this might be a small period of mobility - one semester or an insufficient amount of funds. Since most students indicated that most of the time they spent on academic study and had and had very little free time. Besides, some students had to save money to travel even within the country. Thus, when participating in Erasmus +, interviewees are more focused on obtaining new academic knowledge and experience.

Student 10 claimed following:

“I had a lot of workload from the first day of classes. We studied from morning till 3-4 p.m. Next, I spent a lot of time for doing homework and English courses as I understood that I needed to improve my English. Only on weekends we went to the movies or spent time with friends” (personal communication, December 25, 2018).

In addition, participant (Student 8) explained the priority of studying over the ability to travel:

“Having saved money, I had the opportunity to travel, but since my studies lasted only six months I wanted to spend it with benefit for myself and get as much knowledge as possible for the future. Therefore, I chose to study and spent a lot of time at the university, in the library and communicated with professors and other students” (personal communication, December 12, 2018).

### **Academic Experience Abroad**

According to the students' answers about the time spent during the Erasmus period, students noted the following themes: traveling, social events, parties, trips. However, the academic experience was the main theme of all participants. Students noted that the main activity during Erasmus was going to the university and additional classes on interests, foreign language courses. Regarding academic experience, participants stated that they tried to actively participate in all academic activities and used their full potential. Also, participants acknowledged that they had gained various experiences in terms of academic activities during the Erasmus period. All participants mentioned that attendance was not controlled by professors. However, in case of missing lessons this had a negative effect on the relationship between students and professors, as the study participant (Student 4) explained:

“The activity in the classroom and, of course, the timely passing of projects was course requirements. Although the attendance was not strict it influenced the relations with the professors. I mean, in the case of non-attendance, the professors did not have much enthusiasm to conduct additional classes or explain the topic. Also, it was not possible to “cheat” during the exam. I had to learn a lot! But it should be borne in mind that all professors delivered the information as widely as possible” (personal communication, November 21, 2018).

Three participants stated that they were studying a little less than local students due to the fact that they were exchange students. In all other respects, Kazakhstani students were demanded to do the same amount of work and participation. For example, participant (Student 1) shared the following:

“The academic process is of course different. For example, my classes were held 3 times a week since I am an exchange student, whereas Spanish students studied 4 times a week and Friday was a day off. The grading system is also different. Professors evaluated a student only through independent and project work” (personal communication, November 6, 2018).

As well, nobody mentioned that their classes were held separately from local students. They communicated with local students during classes. It can be concluded that foreign professors view the program as an academic exchange to a greater degree than cultural. Thus, the leniency could not decrease the academic benefits of the program. What makes academic motivation the main reason for participating in the program.

### **Changes in Academic Expectations**

Foreign culture leads to significant and permanent changes in both cultural and academic aspects (Sandgren, Ellig, Hovd, Krejci, & Rice, 1999). This statement is confirmed by feedback from former Erasmus participants. In particular, students stated that they did not have high academic expectations about the program. However, after studying, they were fascinated by the methods and style of teaching, the content of the courses at the host university.

After returning and comparing universities, some students criticize the education system at the home university. Most students criticize the “uniformity” of classes. While in a host university there was a combination of projects, presentations, assignments, and tests. The students also noted that the host university had zero tolerance for cheating during the exams. Important for students was the fact that at host university one could choose courses of interest and study there. As participants (Student 5 and Student 3) mentioned:

“Students are able to choose subjects which they are interested is not depending on classmate’s choice. Therefore, the size of groups was depending (around 15-30). For instance, I studied with different course students starting with freshmen and ending up with final year students. During the course we had different study activities. We had lectures, practical classes, field trips and homework” (personal communication, November 27, 2018).

“In Kazakhstani University we have fixed groups with which we study together for four years. At the lectures we sit in a “stream” (about 100 people). At the practical

classes we sit in a group (24 people). Sometimes divided into subgroups of 12 people. In Spain, everything was different. I could choose disciplines from different courses. That is, on one lesson I sat with students of the 1st course, on the other - 3 courses. At the lectures there are about 100 people. In practical classes, half” (personal communication, November 14, 2018).

In addition, students were asked to compare two universities - home and foreign in the academic aspect. Specific categories for comparison were given, for example, teaching style, studying materials, the role of professors in studying, etc.

Half of the students answered that the education system of the host university was better than in Kazakhstan and that their educational institution should take as an example of some methods from foreign university. Also, three students noted that the methods of teaching style at the host university contributed to creativity and critical thinking. These students participated in projects in the classroom and participation in these projects made them think more critically. Since the requirement was to create their own unique work. Students stated that this assessment method is better than through traditional test or exam.

The participant (Student 2) described his opinion about studying at home and foreign university:

“In my home university we do not have any right to choose subjects that we wish to learn, but there, people study what they find interesting. My faculty in my home university is very weak. One main difference between teachers, is their curiosity and passion in teaching. Their professors are really doing what they love. I always wondered why my Machine Learning professor conducted extra lessons out of his working schedule. That were lessons of advanced course for curious students. Also, big support from TA’s that advice students what better to study in order to find good job. I have spoken to a TA a lot, and he told me that he is doing it just for fun. Moreover, as homework we were given to do highly interesting projects (training own network to play Flappy Bird, creating web site on Java, predict market profit from given dataset etc.). These projects change every year, because it is duty of professors to keep students on trend” (personal communication, November 27, 2018).

Therefore, having experienced new teaching methods, students are no longer quite satisfied with their home university.

Erasmus participants stated that foreign students have more opportunities to see different places and attend different events. For example, students mentioned various study programs abroad, the exchange of international professors, in order to see different teaching methods and styles, more opportunities for the admission of incoming students. They also pointed the greater career prospects of foreigners compared to Kazakhstani students.

Student 10 shared his thoughts on the directions of work of the international department in home university:

“Thank you very much to our professors and the department of international cooperation for the motivation to participate in Erasmus. But this is not enough. I think it would be good if they would help us find work in other countries through the establishment of agreements with international companies” (personal communication, December 25, 2018).

Student 9 also emphasized the importance of international cooperation for future career prospects, “For my specialization is very important international experience. In order to see the work of specialists abroad and adopt it to our realities. It is significant to establish international communication and knowledge sharing” (personal communication, December 24, 2018).

The study shows that former Erasmus students are looking for more international opportunities. They are ready to continue their studies abroad, and later work. Nine participants mentioned that after graduation, they plan to continue their studies abroad. They believe that international experience is very important for them.

Three participants said about insufficient knowledge of the local language and lack of an adequate English speaking skill that was a problem for participation in discussions and other activities during the classes. However, thanks to the support of local students and attendance of extracurricular activities, they were able to learn the local language in a short

time, and significantly improve their English speaking skill. Besides, one participant (Student 4) in addition to local had the opportunity to learn Korean:

“I had an amazing opportunity to learn a new language - Romanian. It is distinguished by its melody, based on a mixture of Slavic and Latin languages. The lessons were held in the form of games and constant communication. Moreover, I managed to learn Korean, within the walls of the same university” (personal communication, November 21, 2018).

Student 1 described his experience of learning Spanish, which allowed him to receive a certificate of knowledge of the language and find a job, “Having settled in Cordoba, I instantly enrolled in Spanish courses, where I spent most of my time speaking and finally received a certificate of completion, which allowed me to get a job at a college of foreign languages” (personal communication, November 28, 2018).

All participants noted that they managed to improve their English skills and practice it. What allowed them to become more confident about their level of language and get the maximum academic benefit. Thus, improving language skills is also the main motive for participating in the program. All participants expected more practice in language and teaching style. Although many students claim that one of the reasons was improvement in language skills, passing an English test or confirming certificates of English is a prerequisite of the program without which they will not be able to participate. In addition, Kazakhstani students expected more practice than grammar in terms of improving their language. Since they believed that it was the lack of practice that prevented them from participating in discussions, presenting works, etc. Students said they want to integrate into the international community, but lack of communication skills prevents this. Therefore, project-and-discussion-based classes, the variety of exchange programs, and English speaking practice classes is what students expect from a learning environment.

### **The Academic Impact of Classroom Teaching and Learning on Students**

Former Erasmus participants stated their opinion about a successful style of teaching and learning.

The active participation in the classroom students called the main aspect for quality learning and teaching. Five students noted active participation in the classroom which led to obtaining better knowledge. Students stated that teachers at a foreign university were in the role of mentors. While in their native university, they are more authoritarian. As

Student 7 explained:

“At my university, the professor is the leader in the lesson and center of the classroom. He explains the topic and mostly speaks. While during Erasmus, foreign professors only guided us and we ourselves had to discuss and understand the topic. The class was more student-oriented. Even those who did not want to actively participate, professors involved and interested in a lesson” (personal communication, December 11, 2018).

Another participant (Student 2) described his observations about the foreign professors’ teaching approach:

“Professors never just read some stuff and students write what he says. Mostly teacher explains by himself the subject. In breaks there is always a big queue of students who want to clear up details. You get the assignment and do research by yourself. If you don’t understand anything, you are always allowed to clear things up. In seminars, TA’s make peer-review, by diving into your project and asking questions about implementation” (personal communication, November 27, 2018).

Thus, student-oriented type of studying more liked by students, they noted its effectiveness and necessity. Students also indicated that they began to be more active in the classroom and feel an interest in the subject.

The importance of a student-oriented approach to studying could be summarized by the following quote of the respondent (Student 4):

“Everything depended on ourselves, if we showed enthusiasm and wanted to work, it was encouraged by professors who were absolutely on a par with students, always ready to go to a meeting, not only to foreign students. The groups are small, the lectures are interesting, because the subjects can be chosen, and the studio classes are active and fascinating, no one encroaches on your personal space and opinion, it is respected for its differences” (personal communication, November 21, 2018).

The next impact of classes that participants indicated is the number of students during class. Half of the students noted that because of the small number of students, the quality of knowledge gained increased. Due to the fact that the professors had enough time for all. However, the other half said that in their home university also the small number of students, which leads to more effective learning.

Finally, the assessment process was noted by all participants in the study. In particular, students were struck by a different system of student assessment. According to returnees, students are evaluated only by independent and project work. While class attendance does not affect the grade in the end. However, if the student misses a lot or is not active in class, the score decreases. At the home university, the assessment comes from many components, like testing, attendance, projects, assignments and the final exam. For example, study participants (Student 10 and Student 6) explained the assessment system in Poland and France university as well as at home university, “The grading system is also different. In Poland, students are evaluated only by independent and project work. During the semester, only participation in the lecture and your performance are taken into account” (personal communication, December 25, 2018).

“In the home university during the semester, the student receives marks for each lesson, lecture, SRO, practical lesson and attendance. Also the milestone control and exams passes. Evaluation is based on a 100-point system. At the University of France during the semester, the student receives only 2 Note A and Note B marks for each discipline. Note A was assigned as a test in the middle of the semester, and Note B at the end of the semester. And there is a letter evaluation” (personal communication, December 5, 2018).

This suggests that in foreign universities, assessment is process-oriented when in the home result-oriented. The students considered that thanks to this assessment system, they did not experience much stress in their studies and the learning process was more even and calm.

To sum, the assessment system, participation during classes and the population were noticed by students as an important component of the educational process. According to students, the assessment system and the active participation contribute to improving learning outcomes and will help them in the real professional situations. A small number of students during classes is also effective, although it does not differ from their home university.

### **Returning from Study Abroad**

In the final part of the interview were questions about the process of returning and adapting after studying abroad. Although some students noted some bureaucratic and other difficulties after returning, in general, they did not experience a significant re-entry shock. The following reasons are suggested. The first reason is the perception of Erasmus as the possibility of a short-term change of residence, a unique journey and interesting study. The students knew that studying in Erasmus lasts only one semester, so they are not strongly attached to foreign education. In addition, they did not forget about the system of education in their home university. The second reason may be the unfamiliarity of the term. Some students noted difficulties in returning home, but they did not name them as a reverse shock. The third reason might be the passage of a long time after the return, so some students have already forgotten about it.

An example provided by the respondent (Student 2) illustrates that he relies only on himself and his knowledge. Thus, upon returning to home university nothing changes and he did not experience significant difficulties with adaptation:

“I have not experienced adaptation difficulties, because I already perceived that self-education is the most important thing and I will not depend more on teachers and care about marks, because it doesn't show your level of knowledge. In Kazakhstan marks only denote your relationship between teacher” (personal communication, November 27, 2018).

Most of the students mentioned the cultural problems of the return. However, among the academic problems of returning students noted the following, this is the difference in teaching languages, the difference in teaching methods and bureaucratic difficulties. Three students mentioned about language difficulties. Among them, Student 8 who described exactly what difficulties she met in terms of language after return:

“At first, it was difficult to reorganize the study to my native language. Since for almost six months I studied in English. During this time, I used to communicate in English with teachers and students. In addition, I liked to perform tasks and projects in English, it seemed like it was something new. But despite all the inconveniences, it took me only a month to reconstruct and get used to my native language in class” (personal communication, December 12, 2018).

Three students complained about teaching methods at their home university. Thus, the study participant (Student 9) claimed the following:

“The study of the Czech Republic was highly interesting and informative for me. I did not even notice how time passed. Upon returning home, I was motivated and wanted to learn. However, having come to the lessons, I immediately noticed the difference and all my enthusiasm was gone. Now I try to study more on my own or ask for additional clarification from professors. In addition, I am looking for other opportunities to study abroad, such as internships, summer schools and more. After graduating from university, I will definitely try to enroll in a master's program in Europe” (personal communication, December 24, 2018).

Finally, a small number of students noted bureaucratic problems after the return.

While most responded that the bureaucratic procedures were easy and quick. The participants (Student 4 and Student 2) described bureaucratic problems as follows:

“Yes! The bureaucracy is something really annoying, for four months I waited for the confirmation of the documents, during this time I was deprived of the monthly stipend, it came late. However, this is the minimum inconvenience! Besides the documents, I had no problems. I was greeted happily at the university, I actively apply the acquired experience in the classroom, I work and help foreign students in adapting to a new culture” (personal communication, November 21, 2018).

“That was actually easy. I just had to validate my transcript of records into registration office. Besides, I had to collect whole bunch of signatures from different people to enroll back to my university. That is actually annoying process, because you have to wait 1-2 hours for every person, because they are mostly absent or in a meeting” (personal communication, November 27, 2018).

In general, students did not notice significant changes in academic life on returning home or deterioration of relations in the academic environment with professors and peers. One of the reasons for the easy adaptation process might be that former Erasmus participants are students with good academic performance and grades. Therefore, after returning, they do not experience any difficulties as they are so strong enough in academic terms. Also, Cohen (2003) stated that being busy academically after returning home can help reduce the reverse effect. Since all study participants returned to the university and continued their studies, and some of them are busy with other activities besides studying such as work in the language center, assistance to foreign students, volunteering, and projects, helped them not to experience a strong reverse shock to the university environment.

It is interesting to note that Cohen (2003) also stated the desire to return to the host country is one of the indicators of re-entry shock. Five study participants stated that they would like to continue their studies in the host country, and all students indicated their intention to work or study abroad. Therefore, perhaps students experienced re-entry shock but did not recognize it. Potentially this is due to the fact that the term is not familiar to them, or to determine this phenomenon requires the help of professionals.

### **Uncommon Themes**

Some themes were mentioned by participants not as often as in the literature of study abroad and its impact.

The first uncommon theme was an emphasis on families. Two women and two men said that they would not like to study longer than one semester due to missing their families or their family might not allow them to stay longer. Nevertheless, all these students stated that in the future they want to continue their Master's studies abroad.

Student 7 and Student 9 explained their feelings about family relationships and study in Turkey:

“Initially, I missed my family and friends a lot. Therefore, I probably would not agree at that moment to study longer than a semester. However, by the end of my, I even began to like the study in Turkey. I had fun with new friends. In addition, the study was so loaded and interesting that there was no time to miss” (personal communication, December 11, 2018).

“I would like to study more than one semester in Turkey if there was such an opportunity. However, my parents missed me a lot as I am the only child in the family. Although they understand that studying abroad will open up new opportunities for me, they didn’t really want me to be far from them” (personal communication, December 24, 2018).

Based on this, it can be concluded that communication with the family and the decision of the family was important for the first experience of studying abroad, in order to increase self-confidence. But now having gained the experience of independent stay abroad and having increased self-confidence, they plan their future on their own. In addition, family ties in Kazakhstan are very strong and parents usually prefer to live with their children throughout their lives, and children usually take care of their parents.

The second uncommon theme was a statement about the level of communication with professors and friends/groupmates both in Kazakhstan and in the host country. When students were asked whether they experienced any differences in terms of interaction with course instructors, eight students stated that they did not experience any changes, because they did not have close contact with professors other than lessons before studying abroad. Particularly, when I asked about changes in relations after returning to home university, the reply of the participant (Student 1) was:

“Our professors are great and true professionals. However, my relations with them have not changed since we do not see each other and do not communicate except during the studying sessions. They were happy for me that I participated in the program. But, after returning, I did not notice any special attention. Everything remained as it was before my trip” (personal communication, November 28, 2018).

While with the professors from host university, many of the participants have remained good friends and still maintain contact. What impressed Kazakhstani students

most is the enthusiasm for work, mentoring and love in the subject of foreign professors. The Student 2 responded about the difference between foreign professor and local, “As mentioned before, the main difference of Kazakhstani and Romania teachers is that Romania teachers love the teaching process and they are quality specialists” (personal communication, November 27, 2018).

With friends/groupmates, most of the participants did not change their attitudes and relationships, and four students noted that they became more respected by friends/groupmates after Erasmus. Student 4 shared his feelings:

“I was greeted happily at the home university, I actively apply the acquired experience in the classroom, I work at the Welcome Center, I help foreign students in adapting to a new culture. Many of my classmates have become more respectful to me” (personal communication, November 21, 2018).

Each participant stated that the Erasmus experience helped them increase their self-confidence. Therefore, it might be concluded that the students, even if they were unsure of themselves before studying abroad, have changed, and those who have already been sure enough, have significantly increased their characteristics. As Student 8 said:

“Before Erasmus, I was a bit unsure of myself. Sometimes I was embarrassed to express my thoughts or was afraid to make a mistake. However, the experience of studying in another country helped me to understand that all people are different and everyone can be wrong. You also need to listen and understand another point of view different from your own. Therefore, I returned to Kazakhstan as another person with a clear understanding of myself and with more confidence. Now I know that I can achieve everything I want. I just need to make an effort and not be afraid to express myself” (personal communication, December 12, 2018).

The last uncommon theme was the barrier to studying through the local language. As can be seen from Table 1, all students have a fairly good level of English that allows them to study abroad. However, four students stated that some subjects were conducted in the local language, which made it difficult to study and gain knowledge in a short period of time.

Student 1 and Student 6 said about the difficulties in learning the local language they encountered during their studies abroad, “Some subjects were conducted in Spanish, and my language level was not so high in order to understand academic speech. But I tried to translate, memorize phrases” (personal communication, November 28, 2018). “There were some difficulties due to the language barrier. Sometimes I did not understand what the teacher was talking about and what task he gave us, but French students helped me” (Student 6, personal communication, December 5, 2018).

In addition, they had to take additional lessons in the local language to fully participate in the lessons. That, on the one hand, was not convenient because of the large load; but on the other hand, it allowed them to master the local language in a short time.

Thus, the uncommon themes mentioned by the participants from this study are: family as an identifier for the length of study or the decision to study abroad; invariance of relations with friends /groupmates and professors of the home university, at the same time close and good relations with professors abroad; and the studying of some subjects abroad, conducted in the host country language and not in English, was a barrier to knowledge sharing.

### **Summary**

The previous section is devoted to analyzing data from ten interviews of former Erasmus + participants while at the same time being undergraduate students at a leading cosmopolitan university in Kazakhstan. This section summarizes the findings from the data analysis.

The main purpose of the students’ participation in Erasmus was regards to academic and career development. The different system of study, developing language skills, adding the experience for their resumes to aid in employment possibilities later are

the motives. In addition, the majority of students after graduation want to either continue their studies or find a job abroad.

Despite the fact that the students before attending the Erasmus program did not have great academic expectations regarding studying abroad, the majority of students met their academic expectations from the program and received invaluable experience, knowledge and new skills after program. One of the obstacles for students is the language barrier. As for the study program itself, it requires a sufficient level of English language. Or, for without it, studying some subjects in the local language is a barrier to sharing knowledge and ideas with peers and professors.

The fact that Erasmus students have the same academic requirements expected of them as local students helps to gain academic experience and benefit from the program. This particularly assists students become familiar with the local style of teaching and learning, and forces them to participate in a natural academic environment. As for personal characteristics gained former Erasmus + students became more open, sociable, independent and ready for new changes in life. They also improved critical thinking skills and become more creative and active.

After studying abroad and gaining the experiences they did, the expectations from the home university changed for them. They have become more critical toward their home university because, students expect different teaching style, better and valid assessment system, and a new style of communication with the professors during classes. Some students noted difficulties after returning to their home university but they did not recognize that this might be the result of a re-entry shock. However, the desire to return to the host country for study or the desire to leave after graduation abroad are examples of such reverse difficulties. This might be explained by the students' unfamiliarity with the effects of re-entry shock.

## **Chapter V: Discussion**

### **Introduction**

The previous chapter introduced the main findings of the study. This chapter provides the discussion of the findings and their in-depth analysis. The aim of this chapter is to answer the research questions about the impacts of study abroad on changes in Kazakhstani students' academic expectations who studied under the short-term Erasmus + academic mobility program and the experience in academic life at their home institutions after their return. The findings from the previous chapter are discussed by examining the existing literature on the above-mentioned issue.

### **Reasons of Students' Participation in the Erasmus +**

The conceptual framework and Expectation Violation Theory (EVT) interpreted the research findings of this study (see the conceptual framework section). Most of the findings are consistent with the literature. For instance, participants called their experience of studying abroad as “a unique chance in my life”, “an amazing opportunity”, “an opportunity to experience the world”. These results are consistent with the definitions in literature such as “turning point”, “experience of a lifetime”, and “eye opening” (Ileleji, 2009; Tekin & Gencer, 2013; Teichler, 2004a).

The first interview questions were designed to understand the reasons for students to study abroad as well as their main motives. The findings showed the reasons for the responders' participation in Erasmus+ included academic experience, abroad experience in terms of life abroad, language level improvement, traveling and cultural experience. These reasons are generally consistent with the literature (Ileleji, 2009; Teichler 2004a; Tekin & Gencer, 2013).

Certel's study (2010) indeed confirms the above mentioned findings but he underlines that students' motives focus on cultural and individual expectations, which

eventually change their direction to academic expectations over time. Whereas in my study, the initial reason for participation was academic expectations from the program.

A study conducted by Sancak (2009) found that the main reason for participation in the program is academic (26.1%) and the experience of new cultures and people (24.8%). However, in the Sancak's study, none of the students mentioned academic expectations as a motive to participate in the program. While again participants in my study noticed academic expectations from the program as a first priority to participate. This fact goes in line with Krupnik and Krzaklewska (2007) finding who reported that for Erasmus students from Central and Eastern Europe the main reasons for participation are academic experience and career goals. However, another group of students is focused on new experience, culture, and people. Based on this, it is expected that students from the part of Kazakhstan that is located close to Eastern Europe are more career oriented. Although the students of this study stated about the new experience, culture, people, and countries, they identified academic experience and language improvement as main motives for participation. Considering the previous mentioned aspect, Kazakhstani students have a career-oriented perception, which coincides with the study of Krupnik and Krzaklewska (2007). It can be assumed, that the reasons for the career-oriented participation of former Erasmus + students might be a limited amount of time abroad (only 6 months), lack of funds, or the student's real desire to take the opportunity to study and gain knowledge and experience in a foreign university.

Overall, this section considers the students' reasons to participate in short-term study programs abroad on the basis of the conceptual framework. While reviewing the literature, it was assumed that study participants may have more experience-oriented reasons for study rather than academic ones. However, the results showed the opposite findings: study participants (students from Kazakhstan) are more academically oriented in

the program. Also, according to the Goodman and Berdan (2013) study abroad should not be viewed as a separate element from education. Thus, authors stressed the academic importance of learning over cultural. My research has shown that the program is perceived primarily as an academic experience rather than cultural, not only by students but also from professors' point of view. All the participants did not note a special attitude towards themselves as foreign students and they were required to have the same amount of knowledge and participation both with local students. Thus, this attitude makes the academic dimension a significant motivation for joining the program.

### **The Change of Academic Expectations of the Participants in Erasmus + Program**

According to the analysis of the students' responses, although the students had certain academic expectations about studying abroad, they later admitted that these expectations exceeded their previous ones. The reasons for changes in these expectations have become participation in various projects, interesting courses, communication with peers, learning a new language and raising the level of English. All these activities were active and intense that participants noted their full interest in studying and even began to attend additional classes on interests.

In my research, there was a question about comparing two university and education systems. Most of the students stated that the host university education system is better than the home university. They also noted that the home university should use the educational methods and style of the host organization as examples. A minority said they did not notice the big difference between the education systems of the two universities. Similar comparison related to universities' academic system were evidenced in Tekin and Gencer (2013) study which stated that all former program participants after returning home compared the education systems of the home and host universities.

Stilianos et al. (2013) stated about the impact of Erasmus on students' experience in studying various educational systems and learning styles. The participants in my study confirmed the above statement and acknowledged that they had experienced various academic styles during the Erasmus period. In particular, the study shows academic experience and achievement are an important influence for students. The research of Tekin & Gencer, (2013) revealed that due to the active participation of students in the classroom, students also were surprised at the teaching style. Besides, students of my study noted that the teaching style at the host university contributed to their active participation in the lessons. Such classes as their own projects, presentations, group work, individual work contributed to their increased interest in the subject.

An important factor in the academic success of exchange programs is learning the language (Mirici et al.; 2009). For participants in my research, although the level of English was high, ignorance of the local language, or lack of knowledge of English (speaking component) was an obstacle to participation in discussions and other activities. What can also be considered as a barrier to the internationalization of education in general. And in particular, students did not expect that ignorance of the local language or insufficient level of spoken English could affect their overall performance in the classroom.

Some researchers emphasize the criticism of students who have studied abroad. They noted that returning students are more critical and condemning towards their native university than objective ones (Cammelli, 2001; Storti, 2001). Some participants of my research also observed criticality the home university after studying abroad. While other remains satisfied with the methods and system of education at the home university. For instance, study participants particularly noted that a different learning style and teaching system contributed to the development of their creativity and critical thinking. In

particular, Demir and Demir (2009) stated that a clear advantage of Erasmus is critical thinking. The respondents of my research stated that participation in various projects in the classroom was the reason for their development of critical thinking. It is important that the assignments were independent and they needed to create unique projects. The participants confirmed the effectiveness of such tasks than the method of evaluation by tests.

My research has shown that after the Erasmus experience, students are looking for international opportunities. They are ready to experience various aspects of internationalization such as the exchange of students, faculty and staff, international cooperation, integrated curriculum, which are also discussed in the literature (Ayoun et al., 2010; Zhang et al., 2010; Jakson, 2008; Schwald, 2012; Waters, 2009). Therefore, students believe that international academic activity is necessary for their field of study and further development.

To sum, the students' academic expectations undoubtedly changed after the program. For instance, they became more active, knowledge-seeking students, ready to participate in the creation of their own projects and to look for various opportunities for academic and career growth. After the return, the students also changed their attitude towards their home university, noting that it would be better to use the methods of studying and teaching and assessing students as in the host university. Also, study participants said that student-oriented approach is much more effective than professor-oriented. Importantly, Sandgren et al. (1999) stated that international culture causes significant and permanent changes. They can be expressed in academic terms. This statement is confirmed by the participants in my research as the students identified Erasmus as a life change and the possibility of academic, career and personal development.

**Academic Life at Home Institutions after Participants' Return**

In order to answer the question about the Erasmus participants experience of the academic life after the return, the final part of the interview questions was devoted.

The findings revealed that the program participants easily adapted to the academic life of the host and home universities after returning, although they noted some difficulties. Respondents stated that most of the time at the host university was spent in an academic environment and preparing for classes. In their free time, they studied the culture of the city and communicated with their peers. Therefore, most of participants noted an easy adaptation process in the host country. According to Sussman (1986), if students adapt quickly and easily to the host country, they will experience a stronger reverse shock. However, despite the fact that the adaptation process at the host university was easy, the participants noted that they did not experience a strong shock when they returned to home university which is opposite to Sussman's study (1986). At the same time, study participants noted the differences between the teaching methods, the language (speaking a foreign language for a long time), and cultural shock as minor problems in adaptation after return.

Another assumption of re-entry process showed the following. According to Cohen's study (2003), the life of students before studying abroad is a direct factor that influences re-entry process. Students who are unhappy with their lives before studying abroad have more difficulties after coming back (Cohen, 2003). Similarly, former Erasmus students who had no problems with adaptation on return stated that they missed their families, friends, social life, food and so on. Therefore, it can be concluded that study participants were satisfied with studying abroad as they were generally satisfied with their life in the homeland. Therefore, in general, this fact explains not a strong reverse shock by participants.

Storti (2001) stated that the general feeling of the beginning, the behavior of people and places seem different or strange after returning. At the same time, another idea shows that if a student is academically busy after returning it can be a help to reduce the reverse shock (Cohen, 2003). It is interesting to note that although the study participants stated a little different attitude toward the places, relationships, people's behavior it is possible that the students did not experience a significant reverse shock as they returned to study at their home university and became actively involved in academic life as well as participating in various own projects. For example, conducting foreign language courses, creating a group of student assistance, etc.

At the same time, the above-mentioned desire to return to the host country is one of the hallmarks of Cohen's repeated shock (2003). In general, for my study, nine students stated that they want to return to the countries of study or abroad. Based on this, the fact that almost all study participants want to go abroad after graduating from their home university speaks of a hidden reverse shock. Students still experience a reverse shock without even recognizing this. Since, moreover, it is not a well-known term, and the detection of a reverse shock requires a professional look.

To conclude, the findings revealed that academic life had slightly changed after returning to home university. However, the program significantly changed students' academic expectations for studies, university, teaching methods, professors attitude, etc. Also, overseas experience has helped them understand the importance of critical thinking, active participation, and involvement in their own development. Now participants are looking for new opportunities for further growth and use their full potential to achieve goals. Although all students have a high GPA, they noted that after the program they became more creative and open to new projects.

Comparing the academic life of two universities, study participants concluded that some methods of teaching and students' assessment can be taken as an example from a foreign university. Expecting the same level of education from their home university, students understand that they will not be able to get what they want. Therefore, the majority of participants want to either study or work abroad.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter was devoted to the discussion of findings using a variety of studies and literature as well as conceptual framework. This study showed consistency with other researchers' findings considering: 1) reasons of students' participation in the Erasmus +; 2) the change of academic expectations of the participants in Erasmus + program; 3) academic life at home institutions after participants' return.

In the next chapter the final conclusion of all the research will be presented, and the recommendations, directions for Further Research will be indicated.

## **Chapter VI: Conclusion**

The previous chapter is devoted to the findings through the relevant literature. The purpose of this chapter is to summarize the current study on the change of academic expectations of the Kazakhstani students in the Erasmus + program and academic life at home institutions after students' return. This chapter consists of conclusion, recommendations for practice and directions for further research.

### **Summary of the Study and Directions for Further Research**

In conclusion, this study was focused on the impact of studying abroad on Kazakhstani students' academic expectations, as well as the academic life of students and the adaptation process after returning to their home university. The study explored the personal experiences, opinions, and ideas of program participants. Thus, understanding the students' experience who have studied abroad contributes to the provision of adequate educational opportunities for future participants of study abroad programs as well as for returnees. The example of Kazakhstan makes this study more significant as it fills the gaps in the existing literature. The data obtained reflect that the academic expectations of participants are changing, and also that it is necessary to provide the students with high-quality studying conditions in order to avoid the reverse shock.

The study indicated that the main motive for the program participation in Erasmus + were academic goals, obtaining new knowledge and experience, improving language skills, communication and collaboration with professors and students. Also, after returning home, most students want to continue their studies abroad or to seek employment opportunities abroad. Therefore, the academic impact of studying abroad should be a matter of study for further research, since the main impact on students was the academic one.

The study also showed that one of the obstacles to internationalization is the language barrier of students. The students noted their insufficient English speaking level as a barrier to their communication while studying at a foreign university. The fact that some subjects were conducted in the local language also became an obstacle in understanding and sharing opinions during the course of study. Considering the above, language teaching methods should be changed in accordance with the requirements of the market and various study abroad programs.

Another important point is that students during their studies abroad did not study separately from local students which allowed them to join the foreign environment and fully participate in all activities as well as get acquainted with the local study conditions and forced them to participate in a real academic environment. This approach helped study participants to interact and communicate with international professors and students.

One of the most important findings is that after studying abroad, the academic expectations of participants from the home university changed as they already experienced a new learning environment, teaching and learning styles, and an assessment system.

Finally, all students did not notice significant adaptation problems and difficulties to return to their home university. However, the desire to leave the university for further study or to find a job abroad are examples of the difficulties of adaptation upon return that could be related to students being unfamiliar with the term of reverse shock. Therefore, the study of students' adaptation problems after studying abroad may be the focus for further study.

Despite the fact that impact of study abroad, some students' problems and motives to participate were identified, it is necessary to link these data with other types of research, and to conduct quantitative and qualitative research directly in Kazakhstan, for example, among Kazakhstani participants and non-participants. Also, in order to capture the whole

study abroad dimension, more people need to be interviewed from different study abroad programs. It would be more beneficial to analyze and compare the different study abroad programs to see exactly which one is the most beneficial for the students. Additional research will help to reduce my biases and will enhance more thorough understanding of the steps involved in study abroad. It is also necessary to study more deeply the national and institutional policies for understanding what affects students. Understanding the main policy levers will increase clarity and understanding of differences between countries in terms of local barriers and drivers. This, in turn, will contribute to creating the most favourable environment for study abroad.

### **Recommendations**

In order to increase the interest of students in participating in study abroad programs, to improve the situation in local universities and to create appropriate conditions for returnees the following recommendations were identified.

Due to the fact that insufficient knowledge of foreign languages was noticed as one of the problems for participation for students. It is necessary to develop mechanisms of motivation to study foreign languages, to expand various methods of teaching foreign languages, providing an increase in the level of language training for students and teachers.

Also, the lack of detailed information about the opportunities for participation in the program is another barrier. Information support is a necessary component of the effective management of participation in Erasmus. Often students have a little idea of participation, basic requirements and pluses of participation. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a system of informing students, teachers and university staff about the tasks, opportunities and problems associated with the program. Information support includes, but is not limited to, the following resources and activities: constantly running multi-level information network; regular seminars, program sessions; meetings with employees of

consulates and embassies; creation of a set of information materials in the form of booklets, films, presentations, primarily in English; maintenance of a database for all students participating in the program.

Lack of quality control and program effectiveness are obvious obstacles. To date, the program monitoring process is limited mainly by quantitative indicators. Regarding quality control, effectiveness is not yet being discussed. Ensuring the quality control of the program is essential, starting with the responsibility of the university itself. It is necessary to develop an intra-university system for evaluating the quality of the program. To achieve program effectiveness, HEIs are recommended to select only accredited programs of foreign universities, carefully study the content of the proposed disciplines and a set of competences to be formed, establish a permanent contact with the coordinator of the host university and conduct a questionnaire for returning students.

In addition, local universities should compare their education styles with international ones and adjust them to the trends of best practices in order to internationalize education and prepare students for further study and successful return. For students who return, academic conditions must be presented for slight adaptation, professors and institutes should understand and meet the needs and expectations of students.

To conclude, many of the above recommendations can be used to improve the situation in the universities of Kazakhstan, and they can be the main motivators for participating in the program. However, by failing to provide sufficient information and support, they thereby create barriers. While linguistic and financial barriers remain the most significant obstacles, more information and support should be provided to potential program participants.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

The Impact of Study Abroad on Kazakhstani Students' academic expectations

**DESCRIPTION:** You are invited to participate in a research on "The Impact of Study Abroad on Kazakhstani Students' academic expectation". The purposes of the research are to explore the change of academic expectations of the participants in Erasmus program and to how participants experience academic life at their home institutions after their return. The researcher is interested in understanding the students' thoughts, ideas about academic expectation after studying in the Erasmus program. You will be asked to participate in a 40-60-minute one-to-one interview scheduled at time and place convenient for you. Your participation in the study is on a voluntary basis, and you can withdraw from the study at any point. In case you hesitate to answer a question, you may not respond to it. The interviews will be recorded using a voice recorder and transcribed later. All the files will be stored in the researcher's personal laptop. Only the researcher and the supervisor will have an access to the data. Once the interviews are transcribed, they will be deleted. The interview information will be kept confidential. I will not use your real name in the research report. Instead, to refer to each participant in the research report, I will substitute students' name using a coding system, such as Student 1, Student2, etc., to protect your identity.

Research findings will be summarized in the final report and might be used for publications or conferences. Confidentiality is guaranteed by the researcher through the use of a coding system for the research participants and numbers to the interviews.

**TIME INVOLVEMENT:** Your participation will take approximately *40-60 minutes*.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:**

There are minimal risks in this study as the data will be collected through one-on-one interviews, and no information related to your personal life will be touched on. Confidentiality will be guaranteed and only codes (Student 1, Student 2, etc.) will be used in the report. In case you hesitate to answer a certain question, you are free not to respond

to it. Your participation in this research study is voluntarily. You may refuse to answer any questions or leave the interview at any point.

Potential benefits of this study include an opportunity to reflect on your experience of studying abroad. Also, the findings might shed light on benefits and importance of Erasmus from your perspective. Students' perceptions of evaluation programs will reveal the strengths and pitfalls that can be summarized into some guidelines on how to better implement the practice of academic mobility through Erasmus. These ideas might be found useful for students who would like to participate in study programs abroad. Also, the results of the study can be used by the professors, institutions, and international offices of the universities, as the students' expectations and levels of satisfaction change after receiving foreign experience and in the process of return there are some difficulties that need to be considered.

**PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS:** If you have read this form and have decided to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. The alternative is not to participate. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. The results of this research study may be presented at scientific or professional meetings or published in scientific journals.

**Questions:** If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this research, its procedures, risks and benefits, contact the Master's Thesis Supervisor for this student work.

**Independent Contact:** If you are not satisfied with how this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a participant, please contact the NUGSE Research Committee to speak to someone independent of the research team at +7 7172 709359. You can also write an email to the NUGSE Research Committee at [gse\\_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz](mailto:gse_researchcommittee@nu.edu.kz)

#### **CONTACT INFORMATION:**

**Questions:** If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this research, its procedures, risks and benefits, contact the Master's Thesis Supervisor for this student work.

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Please sign this consent form if you agree to participate in this study.

- I have carefully read the information provided;
- I have been given full information regarding the purpose and procedures of the study;
- I understand how the data collected will be used, and that any confidential information will be seen only by the researchers and will not be revealed to anyone else;
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason;
- With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**The extra copy of this signed and dated consent form is for you to keep.**

**According to the law of the Republic of Kazakhstan an individual under the age of 18 is considered a child. Any participant falling into that category should be given the Parental Consent Form and have it signed by at least one of his/her parent(s) or guardian(s).**

## Appendix B

### Interview Protocol (for semi-structured interview)

**Interviewee: Student (1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10)**

**Date:**

**Time:**

**Place:**

**Preliminary procedures: introducing**, introducing, the purpose of the study, and anonymity protection; getting permission to record; signing the consent form.

### Dear Participant!

Thank you for participating in the interview which is part of my thesis master's program. The following questions will help me learn more about how has the participation of the Erasmus program changed the academic expectation of students, and finally, how have participants experienced academic life at their home institutions after their return. During the interview there may be some additional questions that will help me to clarify your answers. I would like to remind that the confidentiality and anonymity of your responses will be kept.

### The first part: General information

- 1 When did you participate in Erasmus program?
- 2 In which country did your Erasmus experience take place?
- 3 For how many semesters did you stay abroad with the program?
- 4 What was your major that you studied during Erasmus period?
- 5 What is your current year at school or do you Graduate?
- 6 What is your language level?
- 7 Why did you participate in Erasmus program? (your academic expectation)
- 8 Could you explain the academic satisfaction level at the home institution before Erasmus?
- 9 What was your main motivation to participate in Erasmus program?

- Academic (study in a different country), Cultural (experience a different country, travelling), Personal (improve myself in terms of language, self-confidence and future career) or other, please specify.

**The second part:**

- 1 How was your academic experience in that university?
- 2 Could you please compare the academic process of the Kazakhstani University and the University where you went (answers can be presented in the table form):
  - Please describe the teaching style, the size of study groups (small tutorial style classes or larger lecture type classes)?
  - What can you say about the educational materials?
  - The amount of contact time with teachers?
  - What is the role of teaching staff in teaching?
  - Describe academic requirements, assessment of knowledge and perception?
- 3 Did you experience any academic difficulties in the process of studying at a foreign university?
- 4 What academic expectation did you find more surprising?

**The third part:**

- 1 After returning to your home university, did you experience any adaptation difficulties?
- 2 Describe the returning process in academic context?
- 3 What kind of impact does Erasmus program have on you?
- 4 How much your expectation has changed after experiencing the Erasmus program?
- 5 Final thoughts?

**Follow up procedures:** expressing gratitude for taking part in the interview.

## **Appendix C**

### **Data Analyses Approach Coding Schema**

#### **The uncommon themes**

- TUT 1. family
- TUT 2. relations with peers and professors
- TUT 3. barrier to knowledge sharing

#### **Motivations of students**

- MS 1. Academic experience
- MS2. Travel, language, new cultures, and life abroad

#### **Academic abroad experience**

- AAE 1. University and additional classes on interests
- AAE 2. Foreign language courses

#### **Changes in academic expectations**

- CAE 1. Methods and style of teaching
- CAE 2. The content of the courses
- CAE 3. Education system at the home university
- CAE 4. Study abroad programs
- CAE 5. Exchange of international professors
- CAE 6. Language skills

#### **The academic impact of classes on students**

- AICS 1. Active participation in the classroom
- AICS 2. Student-oriented study
- AICS 3. Number of students
- AICS 4. Process-oriented student assessment

#### **Returning from Study Abroad**

- RSA 1. Difference in teaching languages
- RSA 2. Difference in teaching methods
- RSA 3. Bureaucratic difficulties
- RSA 4. Desire to return