

TC. KOCAELİ ÜNİVERSİTESİ
SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ

YABANCI DİLLER EĞİTİMİ ANABİLİM DALI
İNGİLİZ DİLİ EĞİTİMİ BİLİM DALI

THE EFFECT OF STUDYING IN ELF CONTEXT ON TURKISH
ERASMUS EXCHANGE STUDENTS' L2 ENGLISH LANGUAGE
PROFICIENCY DEVELOPMENT

(M.A. THESIS)

GÜNAY ASLAN ÖZDEMİR

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English Language Teaching Program

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ÖZET

Bu çalışma, İngilizcenin lingua franca olarak kullanıldığı Avrupa ülkelerinde eğitim görmenin ikinci dil olarak İngilizcenin gelişimi üzerindeki etkisini araştırmak için tasarlanmıştır. Yurt dışı eğitim ortamlarının dil öğrenimi için en iyi fırsatları sunduğu (Allen ve Herron, 2003, Alcón-Soler, 2015) ve bu ortamların hedef dilin ana dil olduğu ortamlar olması gerektiği yaygın olarak kabul edilmiştir (Glaser, 2017). Bugün ise, küreselleşmeyle birlikte İngilizcenin dünyanın ortak iletişim dili olması sebebiyle anadili İngilizce olmayan ülkelerde yürütülen yurtdışı eğitim programları da İngilizce öğrenenler için büyük fırsatlar sunmaktadır. Durum bu olunca, Erasmus değişim programı gibi İngilizcenin akademik ve sosyal amaçlar için lingua franca olarak kullanıldığı özel bir yurt dışı eğitim bağlamı ortaya çıkmıştır. Erasmus değişim programının yaygınlaşmasıyla birlikte, İLF etkileşimlerinin yurt dışı eğitim ortamlarında genel İngilizce yeterlilik gelişimine etkisi dilbilimsel araştırmalar için çok önemli bir alan haline gelmiştir. Bu çalışma Avrupa İLF bağlamında eğitim görmenin Türk Erasmus değişim öğrencilerinin İngilizce okuma, dinleme, gramer ve kelime bilgisi yeterlilik gelişimi üzerine etkisini ve katılımcıların program öncesi İngilizce yeterlilik seviyelerinin son gelişimlerinde oynadığı rolü araştırmayı amaçlamıştır. Bu amaçla yarı deneysel tek grup ön test-son test araştırma tasarımı kullanılmıştır. Polonya, İtalya, Macaristan, Hollanda gibi akademik ve sosyal amaçlar için İngilizcenin lingua franca olarak kullanıldığı, anadili İngilizce olmayan farklı Avrupa ülkelerinde 2016-2017, 2017-2018 ve 2018-2019 akademik dönemlerinde 4-12 ay arası öğrenim gören Marmara'daki büyük bir devlet üniversitesinden 140 öğrencisi araştırmaya katılmıştır. Araştırmada rastgele örnekleme yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Bu çalışmada Erasmus + Çevrimiçi Dil Desteği (ÇDD) test sonuçları veri toplama aracı olarak kullanılmıştır. Hareketlilikten önce ve sonra, öğrenciler gramer, okuma, dinleme ve kelime bölümlerini içeren Erasmus + ÇDD testini İngilizce dilinde tamamlamıştır. Çalışmanın sonuçları üç önemli bulgu ortaya çıkarmıştır. İlk olarak, katılımcılar Avrupa İLF bağlamında bir veya iki dönem okuduktan sonra okuma, dinleme, kelime hazinesi ve dilbilgisi İngilizce yeterlilik seviyelerini önemli ölçüde geliştirmişlerdir. İkincisi, program öncesi düşük (A1 ve A2) ve orta (B1) düzeydeki öğrenciler, üst ortadaki (B2) ve ileri seviyedeki öğrencilerden (C1 ve C2) daha fazla gelişme göstermiştir. Üçüncüsü, başlangıçta B2, C1 ve C2 İngilizce seviyesindeki öğrenciler çoğunlukla ya seviyelerini korumuş ya da daha düşük yeterlilik seviyeleriyle ülkelerine geri dönmüştür. Bu önemli bulgulara ek olarak, bu çalışma aynı zamanda uygulayıcıların dikkate almaları için pedagojik çıkarımlarda bulunup, İLF bağlamında yurt dışı eğitimi ve bu eğitimin İngilizce dil edinimi üzerindeki etkileriyle ilgili daha derinlemesine araştırma yapmak isteyen araştırmacılar için de önerilerde bulunmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: yurtdışı eğitim, Erasmus, İLF, İngilizce yeterlilik seviyesi gelişimi.

ABSTRACT

This study has been designed to provide a research into how studying abroad impacts the development of the L2 English in European countries where English is used as a lingua franca. It is widely assumed that the study abroad (SA) settings offer the best opportunities for language learning (Allen & Herron, 2003; Alcón-Soler, 2015) and should be where the target language is the native language (Glaser, 2017). Today, however, SA programmes which are carried out in non-native English-speaking countries also provide big opportunities for English language learners ever since English became the world's lingua franca as a result of globalization. This being the case, a special type of SA context such as Erasmus exchange programme where English is used as a lingua franca for academic and social purposes has emerged. With the prevalence of the Erasmus exchange programme, the impact of ELF interactions in general L2 English proficiency development has become a crucial area of linguistic investigation. The present study aimed to explore the effect of studying in the European ELF context on Turkish Erasmus exchange students' L2 English reading, listening, grammar and vocabulary proficiency development, and the role participants' pre-programme English proficiency level plays on their final improvement. To this end, quasi-experimental one group pre-test and post-test research design was employed. 140 outgoing Turkish Erasmus exchange students of a large state university in the Marmara region who studied in different non-native English speaking European countries where English is used as a lingua franca for academic and social purposes such as Poland, Italy, Hungary, Holland, etc. in 2016-2017, 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 academic years, between 4-12 months, have participated in this study. The random sampling method was used in this study. The present study used Erasmus + Online Linguistic Support (OLS) test results as the instrument for gathering data. Before and after the mobility, students completed the Erasmus+ OLS test in English, which included grammar, reading, listening and vocabulary sections. The results of the study revealed three important findings. First of all, the participants improved their reading, listening, vocabulary and grammar English proficiency levels significantly after studying one or two terms in the European ELF context. Secondly, pre-programme low (A1 and A2) and intermediate (B1) level students progressed more than upper-intermediate (B2) and advanced students (C1 and C2). Thirdly, the majority of the students who were at the B2, C1 and C2 sub-test L2 English levels either remained stable or went back home with lower proficiency levels. In addition to these major findings, the current study also provided pedagogical implications for the practitioners to consider, and suggestions for scholars who are interested in doing more in-depth research on studying in ELF context and its effects on English language acquisition.

Key Words: Study abroad, Erasmus, ELF, English proficiency development.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACTFL	: <i>The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages</i>
AH	: At Home
AY	: Academic Year
ERASMUS	: The European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students.
ELF	: English as a Lingua Franca
ESL	: English as a Second Language
IM	: Immersion
CEFR	: Common European Framework of Reference
CS	: Communication Strategy
L1	: First Language
L2	: Second Language
NS	: Native speaker
NNS	: Non-Native speaker
OLS	: Online Linguistic Support
OPI	: Oral Proficiency Interview
SA	: Study Abroad
SLA	: Second Language Acquisition

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INTRODUCTION

Study abroad (SA) context was generally considered to be where the target language is the local language, hence an optimal environment in terms of input, interaction and impulsion for output and motivation (Sanz, 2014). However, in today's world, it is not limited to the environments where L2 is learned in the target culture with its native speakers. Globalisation made English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) interaction much more prevalent than any other English language interaction because roughly 75% of English users in the world are non-native speakers of the English language (Crystal, 1997), and the majority of English-medium interactions take place among non-native speakers of English (Jenkins, 2005; Seidlhofer, 2001, 2005; Graddol, 1997, 2006). Academic environments where science and technology are formed on theoretical and practical bases are no exception to this general situation.

Today, "English is the language of science, academia and professions" and, consequently, the growing number of scientific programs in tertiary education is using English as the medium of instruction (Björkman, 2013, p. 14). Academics all over the world use English to do research, teach, publish their works, attend meetings and seminars, be a part of a scientific network and even find solutions to the world's problems. Similarly, students in higher education use English while doing academic tasks and projects, attending courses, presenting their works, etc.; therefore, academic context is ideal for investigating the parameters of ELF communication (Björkman, 2013). The growing number of universities which provide English-medium education created a new learning context where students study using ELF (Jenkins, 2013); hence "there has been a shift from study abroad in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts to ELF contexts" (Kaypak & Ortaçtepe, 2014, p. 356).

One of Europe's student mobility programmes, ERASMUS (European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students), for instance, provided a new learning context under the roof of SA context (Pérez-Vidal, 2014). In this respect, SA research in ERASMUS ELF context can contribute more to our understanding of the relationship between academia, ELF, SA, and L2 English acquisition. Europe, where English is the "most widely used lingua franca" (Cogo &

Jenkins, 2010, p. 271), has been the host of many student exchange programmes hence is full of linguistic potentials to be investigated. The Erasmus exchange programme, supported by the European Commission as a unified context, is particularly valuable to collect first-hand data and make the analysis of linguistic investigations concerning English as a lingua franca.

In this respect, one of the main concerns of the present study was to show what kind of effects studying in a non-anglophone ERASMUS programme country had on Turkish students' L2 English reading, listening, vocabulary and grammar proficiency levels. Additionally, the present study attended one of the long-held debates in SA research, namely the link between SA students' initial target language proficiency and the linguistic gains they made during their study abroad. In this regard, the second concern of the present study was whether there is a relationship between Turkish Erasmus exchange students' initial L2 English reading, listening, vocabulary and grammar CEFR proficiency level and their final proficiency development. In order to answer these main questions, 140 Turkish Erasmus exchange students' L2 English reading, listening, grammar and vocabulary pre and post proficiency test results were evaluated according to the Wilcoxon signed-rank test and Spearman's correlation coefficient.

CHAPTER 1

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

The current chapter aims to introduce the study with its background ideology, purposes and significant aspects.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Language learning context is believed to be one of the most important predictors of language development. Different learning contexts can be collected under three major contexts, namely at home (AH), domestic immersion (IM) and study abroad (SA) contexts (Llanes, 2011; Pérez-Vidal, 2014). Study abroad (SA) context is generally believed to be the most effective way for language acquisition (Alcón-Soler, 2015; Allen & Herron, 2003; Allen, 2010; Davidson, 2007; DeKeyser, 2007; Llanes, Arnó, & Mancho-Barés, 2016). What seems to make SA context ideal for L2 acquisition is simply its natural combination of formal and informal learning environments (Collentine, 2009; Freed, 1995).

SA settings have usually been where L2 learners interact with native speakers, thus SA research ignored the settings where L2 learners interact with each other. For example, early SA research (e.g., Brecht & Davidson, 1991; Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsburg, 1995; Carroll, 1967; Dyson, 1988; Magnan, 1986; Willis, Doble, Sankarayya, & Smithers, 1977; Viguez, 1984) investigated American or British students' L2 acquisition in the environments where students were exposed to the target language in a native context.

When the issue is L2 English acquisition, studies were also limited to learning English in a native English-speaking environments based on standard American or British English norms (Kachru, 1985) (e.g., Milton & Meara, 1995; Llanes & Muñoz, 2009; Sasaki, 2004; Serrano, Llanes, & Tragant, 2011). In this regard, the ignorance of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) in the lingua franca contexts and bilinguals' use of the language have been criticized by some scholars. Bley-Vroman (1983), for example, argued that analyzing concepts according to norms of target language creates a serious problem for understanding the systematicity of learners' language. The contradictions between the bilingual aim of SLA research and its

monolingual laboratory have also been echoed in literature (Sridhar, 1994; Y. Kachru, 1994). Firth & Wagner (1997) suggested an overall reconceptualization in SLA research, reasoning that the mentalistic way of SLA researchers' approach to the concepts of discourse and communication fails to consider interactional and socio-linguistics dimensions.

Research on English language acquisition has been conducted in the same fashion under the assumption that native speakers are the norms. In other words, "control over the norms of the English language still rests with speakers for whom it is the first language" (Seidlhofer, 2004, p. 209). However, ignorance of Lingua Franca English in mainstream SLA research is no longer possible as it occupies an enormous place (Jenkins, 2006) such that the whole number of worlds' non-native English speakers exceeds native ones (Crystal, 1997; Dewey, 2007; Graddol, 1997), and the majority of interactions in English occur in lingua franca contexts (Firth, 1996; Seidlhofer 2001, 2004).

As a result of critics over monolingual perception of SLA research and the expanding role of lingua franca English, 21st century has witnessed an unprecedented spread of the novel term English as a lingua franca (e.g., Cogo & Dewey, 2006; Jenkins, 2006; Kirkpatrick, 2010; Seidlhofer, 2004) and research on non-native English produced by ELF communities (Baker, 2009; Berns, 2008; Kalocsai, 2009; Kaypak & Ortaçtepe, 2014; Köylü, 2016; Llanes, Arno, & Mancho-Bares, 2016; Martin-Rubió & Cots, 2018). Yet there is still a huge area for research on L2 English learning in SA programmes where people communicate in ELF (Llanes et al., 2016; Martin-Rubió & Cots, 2018).

Europe, where English is the "most widely used lingua franca" (Cogo & Jenkins, 2010, p. 271), is one of the best settings to look at to understand formal or functional aspects of ELF. The Erasmus+ exchange programme which is supported by the European Commission is particularly valuable to fill this gap because only the United Kingdom, Ireland and partly Malta use English as an official language, while other countries including, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and Turkey all have their own official languages and use English as a

common language of communication (European Commission, 2012). Another reason why the Erasmus+ exchange programme is particularly valuable for understanding ELF context is the numbers of participants. The programme has allowed “more than 9.000.000 direct participants” since it was established in 1987 (European Commission - Fact Sheet, 2017). Only from Turkey, 458.000 participants attended the Erasmus+ programme between the academic years 2004-2017. The estimated number of 144.500 of this Turkish population have studied and/or trained in a European country between 2-12 months since 2004 (Erasmus+ Statistics, 2018), and the majority of them completed their Erasmus mobility in a non-anglophone European country where English is used as a Lingua Franca (European Commission Annual Report-Statistical Annex, 2015, 2016, 2017).

Anticipating that there should be significant impact in spending one or two terms in an ELF environment in terms of L2 English acquisition has led the researcher carry out the present study. The study aimed to find out the effect of studying in the European ELF context had on Turkish Erasmus exchange students’ L2 English reading, listening, grammar and vocabulary proficiency development, and the role participants’ pre-programme English proficiency level plays on their final improvement. Therefore, the settings of this study were the countries in the Erasmus programme, where English is widely used as a Lingua Franca. The participants were Turkish Erasmus exchange students who used English as a common language of communication for their academic and social activities throughout their stay abroad.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

SA context has been mostly considered to be where the second language (L2) is learned in the target culture with native speakers (Sanz, 2014). However, as a result of “globalization, the push for internationalization on campuses across the globe” (Jackson 2013, p. 1), and particularly the “present Englishisation of higher education” (Martin-Rubió & Cots, 2018, p. 97), there has been a shift from study abroad in ESL to ELF contexts” (Kaypak & Ortaçtepe, 2014, p. 356) such as the Erasmus exchange programme, the majority of which takes place between non-native English speaking European countries (European Commission Annual Report-Statistical Annex, 2015, 2016, 2017) where English is the inseparable part of general

education (Seidlhofer, Breiteneder, and Pitzl, 2006), the dominant language of science (Crystal, 2003) and the “official lingua franca” (Cogo & Jenkins, 2010).

Turkey joined the Erasmus exchange programme in 2004. Between the academic years 2004-2017, nearly 458.000 participants, from students to professionals of organizations, have enjoyed the opportunities of ERASMUS including vocational education and training, school education, adult education, youth, and sport. An estimated number of 144.500 of this population have studied and/or trained in a European country from 2-12 months since 2004 (Erasmus+ Statistics, 2018). In the academic years 2014-2015, 2015-2016 and 2016-2017, respectively, 95,8%, 96,3% and 96,7% of ERASMUS outgoing Turkish higher education students studied or trained in a non-anglophone European country (European Commission, 2016, 2017, 2018). In non-Anglophone European countries such as Denmark, Poland, Spain and France, international students attend courses, give presentations, get involved in projects, take exams, and communicate with each other and the local people using ELF (Llanes, Tragant, & Serrano, 2012).

However, non-native English-speaking Erasmus students’ L2 English proficiency improvement after their study in the European ELF context remained unexplored. Additionally, the role their initial L2 English proficiency level plays in this context has also not been investigated. Specifically, we do not have statistically significant results which show the effect of studying in the European ELF context have on Turkish Erasmus exchange students’ L2 English reading, listening, vocabulary, and grammar proficiency levels, as well as the influence of initial L2 English proficiency level on their final proficiency progress.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The link between SA context and second language acquisition (SLA) has been investigated many times (e.g., Freed, 1995, 1998; Lapkin, Hart, & Swain, 1995; Llanes & Mun˜oz, 2009; Llanes, 2011; Teichler & Maiworm, 1996) in the environments where the target language is spoken as L1. In the same vein, English as a Lingua franca has been investigated for various purposes (e.g., Cogo & Dewey, 2006; Kirkpatrick, 2010; Jenkins, 2006; Seidlhofer, 2004), yet not for the purpose of investigating the effects of studying in an ELF environment in terms of English language acquisition. However, ELF is a “special type of intercultural

communication” (House, 2012, p.1) with its multilingual speakers, own forms, strategies and outcomes, thus what we know little about is a considerable gap for SLA.

In this respect, the present study fills this lack of SA and ELF research by investigating the linguistic progress of Erasmus participants who studied in the European ELF environments. Therefore, the findings of this study will shed light on the linguistic outcomes of English learners’ academic and social interactions. At the same time, the study can be a local guide for the European Commission to collect evidence on the impact of teaching and learning in ELF and to develop robust language policies in order to provide more appropriate linguistic support to Erasmus participants.

1.4 DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

AH Context: It is where students learn L2 in the L1 setting with semi-intensive formal instructions.

CEFR: It is a common basis which includes languages syllabuses, examinations, assessment, curriculum planning, textbooks, etc. across Europe.

English as Lingua Franca: It is the most common language of communication for people who have different mother tongues.

Erasmus Exchange Programme: It is an exchange organisation including education, training, youth and sport for the participants across Europe.

IM context: It is where students learn L2 in an L1 setting but with more intensive content integrated into academic or extra-curricular activities.

Online Linguistic Support: It is an online test which assesses Erasmus participants’ language proficiency level before and after the ERASMUS mobility.

Study Abroad Context: It is where L2 is learnt in the target culture both in formal classes and social environments.

CHAPTER 2

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter includes three sections. In the first section early and recent research on second language learning in the SA context will be provided with the empirical findings. In the second section, the concept of ELF will be presented with its theoretical background in light of the current status of English in the world and the European Union. The third section will provide research on English language acquisition during studying abroad within the ELF context.

2.1 STUDY ABROAD AND SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

SLA research investigated L2 learning in three different contexts (Collentine, 2009), namely at home (AH) context where students learn L2 in L1 setting with semi-intensive formal instructions, Immersion (IM) context where students learn L2 in L1 setting but with more intensive content which is integrated into academic or extra-curricular activities, and SA context where L2 is learnt in the target culture both in formal classes and social environments (Collentine & Freed, 2004).

SA context is generally believed to be the most effective way for language acquisition (Alcón-Soler, 2015; Allen & Herron, 2003; Allen, 2010; Davidson, 2007; DeKeyser, 2007; Jackson, 2013; Llanes et al., 2016;) because the learner is assumed to be naturally exposed to both the target language and the culture with various academic and social activities (Howard, 2005). This idea is so widely believed that every year millions of students leave their home temporarily for learning a foreign language by studying or residing in a country other than their own. Naturally, there has been a growing body of research on the impact of SA context on L2 acquisition (e.g., Brecht, Davidson & Ginsberg, 1993; Freed, 1998; Lafford, 2004; Lapkin et al., 1995; Segalowitz & Freed, 2004).

SA research, which dates back to late 1960s, has been mainly on the development of oral, literacy, sociolinguistic and communicative skills as well as students perceptions about their L2 acquisition in the environments where the target language is spoken as the mother tongue. These studies have been mostly in a comparative fashion, namely SA versus AH and/or IM settings (Freed, 1995, 1998).

2.1.1 The Effect of Study Abroad Context on Oral and Communicative Skills

Oral proficiency has been investigated very often in the SA context as it is believed to develop most during abroad (Llanes, 2011). The focus of early SA research has primarily been on oral development. In the 1980s, scholars frequently used the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) to measure oral proficiency progress of students who had been abroad (Freed, 1995). Some of them were Veguez (1984), Liskin-Gasparro (1987), Magnan (1986), O'Connor (1988) and Milleret (1991).

Veguez (1984) and O'Connor (1988) analyzed oral progress of Middlebury College students who spent a year respectively in Spain and France measured by Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) scale and found that these students showed one or two levels of improvement in fluency. Liskin-Gasparro (1987), Magnan (1986) and Foltz (1991) similarly used OPI, but in a comparative fashion between students who studied abroad and stayed at home. They reported that the ones who studied abroad recorded higher oral proficiency than the home-group. Brecht and Davidson (1991), Brecht and Robinson (1993) and Brecht et al.'s (1993) studies based on years of assessment of Russian learning in study abroad context, elucidated a lot of different aspects of SA, including its impact on oral improvement. Findings of these joint works confirmed the positive impact SA experience had on speaking in the target language.

Lapkin et al., (1995) in their study called *Evaluating the Linguistic Impact of a Three-Month Stay in Quebec* measured French Language Proficiency gains of English-speaking adolescents over a three months stay in Quebec. Although participants showed improvement in both literacy and oral skills, greater gains were made in oral skills. A recent study by Segalowitz and Freed (2004) also supported the belief that the SA context has superiority over AH context in terms of oral proficiency. Another recent study conducted by Freed et al. (2004) assessed oral proficiency of 28 students studying French in three different contexts, namely study abroad (SA), intensive summer immersion program (IM) (formal classroom and extracurricular activities) and at-home (AH). It was seen that the IM and SA group both made significant gains, although IM group made greater gains in all measures.

The AH group, on the other hand, made no significant gains. Similar to Freed and her colleagues, Díaz-Campos (2004) reported conflicting results with the long-held belief that the SA experience has a significantly positive impact on speaking skills. The study reported that SA and AH students showed equal improvement in “voiceless stops and word-initial” and absence of “intervocalic voiced fricatives” in other words, contrary to expectations, there were not “striking differences” between SA and AH students (p. 269).

Improvement of communication strategies in the SA context studied by Lafford (2004). She asked, “How does use of communication strategies (CSs) vary between learners in the AH and SA contexts” (p. 205). The post-test results were unprecedented in a way that SA students used “significantly fewer CSs” (p. 217) than did their AH peers. DeKeyser’s (1986, 1991) studies revealed little difference between the SA group in Spain and AH group in the US in terms of communication strategies.

Despite the studies which have revealed conflicting results, the majority of findings seem to be supporting the positive link between SA context and oral proficiency. According to Freed (2008), “we can state with confidence that the SA experience promotes gains in oral fluency, resulting in speech that has fewer dysfluent (individual and clustered) hesitations than that of their AH peers” (p.117).

2.1.2 The Effect of Study Abroad Context on Listening Skills

Listening skills are accepted as one of the fundamental skills for a successful L2 acquisition (Saville-Troike, 2006). “Most of the studies attempting to document improvement in listening comprehension ability have in fact succeeded” (Kinging, 2009, p. 59).

Dyson (1988) investigated British students’ progress in listening after spending one year in Germany, France or Spain and found significant progress for low-level students. Similarly, Willis et al. (1977) examined British students’ German or French as a second language improvement after having spent more than a year in Germany or France. They found considerable gains in students’ speaking and listening skills and signs of improvement for reading and writing.

Studies conducted with various assessment instruments to see the relationship between SA and progress in multiple language skills (Speaking, listening, reading,

writing) such as Brecht et al. (1995) and Lapkin et al. (1995) also reported progress in learners' listening performance.

Recently, Llanes and Muñoz (2009) measured Spanish students' listening, oral fluency and accuracy gains in English after short term (3-4 weeks) stay abroad. They found that students produced significant improvement on most of the measures. Allen and Herron (2003) and Kinginger (2008) in their investigation whether American students' French listening skills improve after SA experience (respectively 6 weeks and one academic term) found significant changes in the participants' post-test results. Cubillos, Chieffo and Fan (2008) in their study *The Impact of Short Term Study Abroad Programmes on L2 Listening Comprehension Skills* measured L2 listening progress of two groups including 48 students in SA and 92 students in AH context. Results indicated similar gains for both, however, "study abroad groups achieved higher levels of confidence and self-perceived ability after the treatment" (p.157) and used "more sophisticated listening comprehension strategies" (p.173). Another short term study, Savage and Hughes (2014) reported statistically significant improvement in L2 Chinese listening performance for the students who participated in 6-week Chinese summer language immersion programs. The study revealed an interesting result, it showed that there was no difference between the students who participated in the IM programme for the first time and more than one time. Evans and Fisher (2005) investigated whether young learners improve their multiple language abilities in the short term SA experience. Of all skills tested, it was seen that listening and expressive use of language in writing were the most developed skills. Comparing SA and AH students' listening progress, Beattie, Valls-Ferrer, and Pérez-Vidal (2014) revealed that "participants obtained significantly larger gains in listening comprehension in the SA context than in the FI context" and attributed the results to the "beneficial effect of the natural environment of a SA context" (p. 211).

2.1.3 The Effect of Study Abroad Context on Grammatical and Vocabulary Skills

Research which investigated the relationship between L2 grammatical improvement and SA has revealed contradictory results. However, generally, there seems to be a lack of support for the SA context in terms of promoting grammatical gains (Freed, 2008; Kinginger, 2008; Walsh, 1994). Rule and feedback-free

environments, such as SA, might cause fossilisation and decline in grammatical accuracy (Higgs & Clifford, 1982; Krashen and Seliger, 1975), which seems to be echoed in the studies that explored grammatical improvement in the SA context.

Möhle and Raupach's (1983) study revealed a lack of improvement for some of the grammatical measures of German students in France. As reported by Freed (1995, p. 10), "German students' grammar, in terms of frequency of mistakes, or length and syntactic complexity of sentences, did not change in any noticeable way as a result of several months spent in France. There was a change, however, in the speech rate and the length of time between utterances". DeKeyser's (1986, 1991) studies revealed little difference between SA group in Spain and AH group in the US, in terms of grammatical competence and communication strategies; however, on the vocabulary knowledge, SA group showed significantly more progress than their AH peers. Collentine's (2004) study, *The Effects of Learning Contexts on Morphosyntactic and Lexical Development*, compared SA group in Spain and at home (AH) group in an American University. The findings suggested that AH students developed more on "discrete grammatical and lexical features" (p. 227). However, the SA group was better in terms of narrative abilities and producing semantically more complex language.

On the other hand, there are studies which found significant positive effects of studying abroad on L2 grammatical competence. Guntermann (1995), for example, compared the AH and SA students in terms of their past tense improvement and found that SA students received higher results than AH students. Some studies supported significant aspects of SA context in terms of grammatical competence but mostly for advanced students who have pre-programme sufficient knowledge (Grey, Cox, Serafini, & Sanz, 2015; Isabelli, 2004; Isabelli & Nishida, 2005; Lennon, 1990; Juan-Garau, 2014). Isabelli (2004) investigated the Spanish syntactic and null subject development of 31 American intermediate learners of Spanish during their 9 months stay in Barcelona. The study had no comparison group and revealed that except third null subject property (that) the participants showed statistically significant improvement on all other parameters. It was also indicated that more advanced students became more successful in all grammatical properties.

Dewey (2008) explored Japanese Vocabulary Acquisition by measuring the differences between study abroad (SA), intensive domestic immersion (IM) and

academic year formal classroom (AY) students. According to the post-test results, despite being better than AY learners, SA and IM students' vocabulary growth were similar. SA group performed better in all measures than AY participants. However, according to the Vocabulary Knowledge Scale results, it was also found that the SA group became familiar with more words compared to the IM and AY groups. Grey et al., 2015, on the other hand, did not compare different contexts but investigated the role individual differences (cognitive capacity) play on morpho-syntactic and lexical development during short term study abroad. The study found significant growth both in grammatical and lexical competence and no relationship between language gains and cognitive capacity. Llanes and Muñoz (2009), based on 3-4 weeks SA experience, explored students' linguistic gains through oral fluency and accuracy measures, and found that the lexical errors diminished significantly after the SA experience. Based on 6-weeks homestay in Australia without direct instruction, Conroy (2018) found that Chinese students showed significant improvement in terms of identifying the idiomatic phrasal verbs when they encountered in speech. Two of the students who shared a home with English speakers from different L1 backgrounds, such as German and Japanese also showed significant gains, although they interacted in L2 English. In this respect, the study showed that even in a short terms non-native speaker interaction in a casual context improves vocabulary skills. Milton and Meara (1995) also found that the SA context (the United Kingdom) is four times more effective than the classic classroom context according to the Eurocentres Vocabulary Size Test. Also, the study revealed that low-level students progressed better than advanced students. Ife, Vives and Meara (2000), on the contrary, reported that Intermediate and advanced learners improved their vocabulary skills more than low-level students. The study compared one and two termed SA students' vocabulary progress and found significant gains for both groups but no significant difference between the groups, except students who studied two terms performed better in terms of "items gained and lexical organisation" (p. 15).

2.1.4 The Effect of Study Abroad Context on Reading Skills

Reading and writing comprehension had received the least attention in the SA research (Dewey, 2004; Kinginger, 2009); however, overall, research in this area looks optimistic for writing and reading comprehension (Kinging, 2009).

Brecht et al. (1995) and Lapkin et al. (1995) in their investigation of various language gains in SA context, respectively American students in Russia and Anglophone participants in French Quebec, found improved reading proficiency after the SA experience. Also, both studies revealed that participants with low-level reading proficiency progressed more compared to advanced level students. Huebner (1995) compared reading comprehension of two groups of American students who studied in Japan and the United States. Both SA students in Japan and AH students in the United States attended a summer intensive program. The results showed that the SA group, even though they had no background knowledge of Japanese, showed improvement more than their AH peers, but both groups performed the same in terms of character recognition. Similar to Huebner (1995), Dewey (2004) assessed reading comprehension by comparing SA and IM (Intensive Domestic Immersion) students, by three measures, namely vocabulary knowledge, free-recall and self-assessment. The results suggested that the difference between IM and SA students was not significant on vocabulary knowledge and free-recall, however, SA students showed significantly more progress on self-assessment measures. Iwasaki (2007) analyzed the Japanese language improvement of students from the United States who spent a year in Japan. After their sojourn, students took the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT). It was reported that the students progressed both in the Reading/Grammar section and Character/Vocabulary section and their level of progress was somewhat similar. Kinginger (2008) found that American students in France, after their one academic term sojourn, performed higher in the reading section of Test de Français International, nonetheless, the reading scores were not as significant as grammar scores. Savage and Hughes (2014), a comparative and short term study, reported statistically significant improvement in L2 Chinese reading comprehension for the students who participated in a 6-week Chinese summer language immersion programs. Watson, Siska and Wolfel (2013) investigated U.S. Military Academy students reading development in Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish after a single semester-long immersion experience in 14 countries. The results revealed that 69% of participants demonstrated improvement in their reading skills.

2.1.5 The Effect of Study Abroad Context on Writing Skills

Freed, So, and Lazar (2003) analyzed the native-speakers' perceived written fluency of SA students who spent a semester in France and AH students in the classic learning environment. The results showed no support for the superiority of SA students over AH students similar to Freed and her colleagues' previous studies (1998, 1999). In a 'three contexts' study, Serrano et al. (2011) examined Spanish students' written performance in English. The first group were Erasmus students in the U.K., while the second group included students who took an intensive or semi-intensive language course at home context. Post-test results demonstrated that SA students performed better than the semi-intensive group but the same with the intensive group. Sasaki (2004) examined 11 Japanese students' changes in writing quality, fluency and confidence over 3,5 year period. Six of the students from this small group spent 2-8 months in countries where English is spoken as a mother tongue, while the others remained in Japan. The results suggested that both groups improved their "English proficiency, English composition quality/fluency, and confidence in English writing" (p. 524) however, it was observed that SA students were more motivated to write better compositions and could write their ideas without translating from L1 to L2. Sasaki (2009) conducted a follow-up study and found more significant results in terms of AH and SA division. SA participants improved their L2 writing skills more than AH participants. Llanes and Munõz (2013) compared adult and young learners' writing gains in English in AH and SA context. They found that adults benefited more from the AH setting and outscored the SA adult group in writing fluency. Young learners, on the other hand, benefited more from the SA setting.

2.1.6 The Link Between Pre-Programme Target Language level and Target Language Gains in the SA context

Initial language knowledge can be significant in terms of gains made during studying abroad (Davidson, 2007). There are multiple views on the impact of initial level on SLA in the SA context, however, the majority of research supports the idea that the lower the initial level is the higher the progress in L2 (e.g., Freed, 1995,

1998; Lapkin et al., 1995; Llanes & Muñoz, 2009; Llanes, 2011; Teichler & Maiworm, 1996).

Brecht et al. (1993) as the first large scale study with 658 students studied in Russia for 4 months analyzed the predictors of language acquisition in the SA context. Along with multiple factors such as age, gender, and country of birth, they also investigated the pre-program level of the students. The authors found a negative correlation between language gains made during studying abroad and the high pre-programme level in all skills (reading, listening and speaking). Brecht and Robinson (1993), on the other hand, found that high-level students interact more, that is why they improve their language abilities more. Lapkin et al. (1995) measured French Language Proficiency gains of English-speaking adolescent and its link to participants' initial proficiency level. The results showed that participants with a low level of French language proficiency made greater improvements. Milton and Meara (1995) examined the English vocabulary development of German, Spanish, Italian and French students who had been in Britain. It was reported that while low proficiency level students showed significant improvement compared to their at-home peers, "students who already possessed a native-like or near native-like level of fluency did not progress" (p. 22). Llanes and Muñoz (2009), based on 3-4 weeks SA experience, compared low and high-level students' linguistic gains through oral fluency and accuracy measures, and found that low-level students showed greater gains in "using L2 word and in producing more accurate and fluent speech" (p. 361).

Freed (1990) in her study *The Effects of Interactive and Noninteractive Out of Class Contact on Grammatical Achievement and Oral Proficiency* looked for the difference between students at various levels. She found that high-level students, namely high intermediate and advanced, benefited out-of-class contact more than low-level students. Davidson's (2007) one of the main focuses was the role of the initial level of the language in SA context. The study suggested that "learner control and awareness of language structure prior to study abroad is correlated positively with second language gain in all modalities during study abroad" (p. 279). Cubillos et al. (2008) conducted comparative research and explored listening development of SA versus AH students. Results indicated that in both groups, students with higher pre-programme proficiency achieved higher listening comprehension. From another perspective, DeKeyser (2007) suggested that students should have some level of

declarative knowledge prior to studying abroad so that they can “complete the process of proceduralization and make substantial progress towards automaticity” (p. 217). He also added that short term SA experience works more efficiently for low-level students, while in the long run high-level students progress more. DeKeyser (2010) investigated American students’ oral L2 Spanish development through a short time period (6 weeks) in Argentina. He noted that students who have the most initial knowledge of Spanish have made the most progress. The author also made an important observation that students with insufficient pre-programme grammar knowledge of Spanish frequently had to deal with “feeling of demoralization” and “distorted input processing” (p. 90) through conversations with the native speakers, which consequently influenced their learning negatively.

To sum up, even though an important body of research supports that the lower the initial level is, the higher the gains in L2 skills, there is not a general agreement on what the threshold level should be to make the most progress. Skill type (receptive or productive) may have a relationship with the proficiency level in the SA context. Grammatical competence, for instance, reported being improved more with advanced students (Grey et al., 2015; Isabelli & Nishida, 2005; Juan–Garau, 2014). Additionally, individual differences may play an important role between the initial target language level and the progress made in this language. As in the DeKeyser’ (2010) case, some low-level students may feel demoralized because of insufficient background knowledge in L2, thus stop progressing. On the other hand, some may push for new input looking for new opportunities to practice, hence show improvement. In the same vein, relatively high-level students may feel more self-confident than weaker students; hence they find more opportunities to practice in L2.

2.1.7 Time Spent Abroad

The first extensive study about the relationship between SA and language learning was Carroll (1967). The study analyzed the target language (French, German, Italian, Russian) developments of American college students, and found that the longer the time spent abroad, the more likely the students improved their language skills. Ife et al. (2000) compared SA students’ vocabulary gains who studied one or two terms, and concluded that the longer the time spent abroad the better both in terms of “items gained and increased lexical organisation” (p. 15).

Llanes and Muñoz (2009) compared oral fluency and accuracy gains of the students who spent three and four weeks abroad, and noted that students who were abroad for four weeks “performed the oral task with greater fluency and accuracy” than students who were abroad for three weeks (p. 362). In her longitudinal study, Sasaki (2009, 2011) investigated whether different lengths of SA experience have a different impact on students’ L2 writing ability. The study found that students who stayed longer improved their L2 writing abilities more than the short-stay group. Students who stayed more than four months abroad were observed to be motivated to write better in L2 (Sasaki, 2009) and showed significantly more improvement in L2 writing than the ones who stayed shorter (Sasaki, 2011). Hoffman-Hicks (2002), *The Longitudinal Development of French Foreign Language Pragmatic Competence*, stated that while short term stay in SA context is beneficial to some extent, native-like abilities begin to arise after ten months. Similar to previous studies, Davidson (2007) approved the longer the better idea stating that although short time can motivate students to learn the language of that country, “linguistic and cultural proficiency for second language learners is extremely unlikely to occur in short timeframe” (p. 279). However, he also added that though there is a clear relationship between second language gains and program duration, spending long-time (9-12 months) abroad should be combined with serious and culturally focused language study.

On the other hand, Freaser (2002) who compared one versus two-semester American students’ gains of German in a German university, contrary to the general belief, found that although long-term residence in the SA setting thought to be far superior to short-term, one can make impressive gains in a short period of time abroad.

To sum up, the idea that the longer the better seems compatible with language learning in the SA context. Yet, Freaser (2002) shows us the powerful role the individual differences might play even in the short time residence abroad. Moreover, “the question of how long is needed to make significant gains in specific skills still remains unanswered” (Churchill & Dufon, 2006, p. 23).

2.1.8 Individual differences and Other Variables in the SA context

Although language learning in the SA context is now a “recognized subfield” of SLA research (Freed, 2008, p. 113), we can not claim that impact of SA on linguistic development has been proven (Kinging, 2009). Research on SA seems to be evolving from supporting an overall positive impact of the SA experience to a varied one changing according to the set of categories and conditions of the SA context.

Engle and Engle (2003) organized these set of categories as time spent abroad, pre- programme language competence, the language of instruction in the academic courses, the context of academic work, accommodation types of participants and the degree of guidance for intercultural and experiential learning. These set of categories are all combined in different ways in each study abroad programme; therefore, each participant goes back home with different outcomes (Engle & Engle, 2003).

Tanaka (2007) and Davidson (2007, p.277) discussed that just being in the country where the target language is spoken is not enough instead; “substantial immersion experience in the target culture” is necessary. Similarly, DeKeyser (2010) stated that “no magical implicit learning processes take over when the students go abroad” (p. 90), instead SA experience can only yield good results when the learner puts more on what he already knows with new input and practice. Also, it is important to be eager to benefit from any kind of opportunity inside and outside the classroom for language development in the SA context (Mendelson, 2004).

Freed, Segalowitz and Dewey (2004) underlined the importance of “the nature of the interactions and the quality of the experiences” (p. 298) whether in SA or AH context.

Some of the SA research which compared different learning contexts (e.g., Freed et al., 2004; Dewey, 2004, 2008; Serrano et al., 2011) yielded superior results for the domestic immersion setting over SA setting in a way that the intensity of learning rather than the location facilitated more development. For example, Dewey (2004) suggested that the IM context can be more advantageous than the AH and SA contexts.

Despite long-held belief about study abroad experience that it is the best way to learn a language, individual differences also play an important role in our learning

process cognitively or psychologically (Sanz, 2014). Moreover, the effect of individual differences intensifies particularly during study abroad experience (Huebner, 1995). For example, it was generally observed that students with low language aptitude become more successful in static learning environments such as AH context, while students with high language aptitude achieve more in SA context which is relatively flexible and informal (Sanz, 2014). Freed (1998) underlined the importance of individual differences, as well as the aspects of the target language, motivation, learning styles, extent of immersion and aptitude in terms of their powerful impact on the degree of language learning in the SA setting. Additionally, Coleman (1998) argued that language learning should not be solely based on statistical measurements, but also sociocultural and intercultural aspects should be taken into consideration because they determine the way language learners communicate with the L2 learners hence the extent of language learning.

Last but not least, the quality of language learning in the SA context is also shaped by educational policies. Language acquisition in the SA context carries a huge potential for confirming the demands of education in the 21st century, but its appropriate integration into the sub-systems of education, such as curriculums and policies, is crucial (Davidson, 2007).

2.2 ENGLISH TODAY

In his famous and comprehensive book, *English as a Global Language*, Crystal (1997) explains the very prerequisite of being a global language. “A language achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country” (p.3). “Economic, technological, and cultural power” of the countries which use English as their mother tongue, such as the U.K. and USA, helped the English Language transform its “special role” to global recognition (Crystal, 2003, p. 7). More precisely, “Britains’ colonial expansion” (p. 9) in the late nineteenth century and the “rise of the US” (p. 8) as a superpower after WWII paved the way for English to become an economic, political, scientific, technical, cultural and communicative instrument around the world (Graddol, 1997).

Being the language of such a wide range of domains, in the 21st century, English is used by three major groups, namely people who use it as the mother tongue, second language, and foreign language (Graddol, 1997). Kachru (1985)

made a categorization of these three groups of English speakers around the world, namely “inner circle”, “outer circle” and “expanding circle”. He explains that the Inner circle includes the native speakers of English such as the U.K., Australia, USA and Canada, the Outer circle includes countries such as Nigeria, Singapore, India, Kenya, Pakistan where English has an official function and is used as a Second or additional language, and thirdly there are expanding circle countries which use English as a foreign language e.g. Germany, Japan, China, etc. As it is seen in Figure 1, non-native English speakers, namely second and third circle countries, represent the majority of English users.

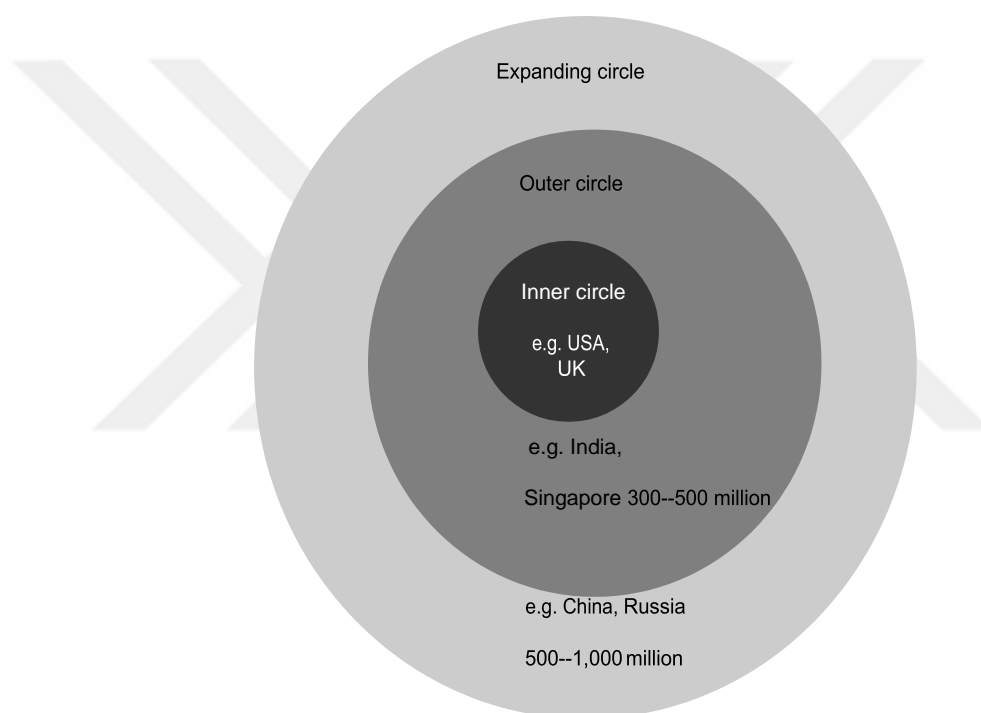


Figure 1. Inner, outer and expanding circle of English according to Kachru (1985) with approximate speaker numbers in millions according to Crystal (1997).

Roughly two billion people in the world use English (Crystal 2008) and 75% of English users are non-native speakers of the language (Crystal 1997); therefore, inevitably, the majority of English-medium interactions take place among ‘non-native’ speakers of English (Seidlhofer, 2001; 2005, Graddol, 1997, 2006). If we narrow the circle, the last group, so-called expanding circle, particularly includes around 1 billion people who live in countries where English has no official function but is used as a dominant foreign language. The wide range of areas English is used

in today's world, listed by Graddol (1997), also explains the magnitude of non-native English interactions. These areas are;

1. Working language of international organizations and conferences
2. Scientific publication
3. International banking, economic affairs, and trade
4. Advertising for global brands
5. Audio-visual cultural products, e.g. TV, popular music
6. International tourism
7. Tertiary education
8. International safety
9. International law
10. In interpretation and translation as a relay language
11. Technology transfer
12. Internet communication (p. 8).

To sum up, today English is mostly used as a lingua franca by its non-native speakers especially because outer and expanding circles' aforelisted (listed by Graddol, 1997) functional adaptation to the globalized world (Björkman, 2013).

2.2.1 ELF

“Lingua franca languages are traditionally associated with communication between people who have different first languages from the language being used to communicate” (Baker, 2009, p. 569). English has served as a lingua franca in two different ways throughout the history, namely a contact language between colonies until colonization is over, and a global language when the technology and economic relationships made the boundaries more transparent (Canagarajah, 2006).

However, it is the 21st century which has seen an unprecedented spread of the novel term, “English as a lingua franca” (e.g., Kirkpatrick, 2010; Jenkins, 2006; Seidlhofer, 2004), and a growing body of research on ELF (Jenkins, 2003, 2007; Cogo, 2012; Seidlhofer, 2009) because of the fact that non-native English speakers around the globe exceeded the native ones (Graddol, 1997; Crystal, 1997, Dewey, 2007; House, 2003), and the majority of interactions in English occur in lingua franca contexts (Firth, 1996; Seidlhofer 2001, 2004).

“English is used as a lingua franca is a contact language between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication” (Firth, 1996, p. 240). Many languages in history functioned as a lingua franca, but none of them had the functional, geographical, cultural and linguistic flexibility of English. ELF, while serving for a medium of communication, can be absorbed by different national and individual identities. In other words, when a German and French speaker interacts in English, both sides can creatively use their interactional standards as well as cultural and historical senses (House, 2012).

The unique characteristics of ELF can be understood from the distinction between ELF and EFL. ELF interactions occur between NNSs and all English varieties are accepted part of a third language system, hence does not need to fit in a native speaker version. EFL interactions, on the other hand, mostly occur between NSs and NNSs, and the goal is to be native-like as much as possible (Cogo & Jenkins, 2010, p. 275). In other words, one should consider ELF as an “additionally acquired language system” (Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English), one that does not accept native versions as the norm and stick to the authority (Seidlhofer, 2013).

2.2.2 ELF in the European Context

English used in European’s daily written and spoken communication has the aforementioned lingua franca character as it is constantly forming itself according to European context that is why even British, American or any other norm providers should learn the characteristics of ELF communication (Cogo & Jenkins, 2010).

Today there is obviously an increasing demand for English in Europe, as the growing number of people in Europe find English necessary and are becoming fluent in it. One can even state that to be part of the European Union “politically, economically and socially”, it is significantly desirable to have English (Hoffmann, 2000, p. 20). In Europe, the vehicle language used in business and diplomacy is usually not the mother tongue of each interlocutor (Meeuwis, 1994). French and German are also prevalent among Europeans, but the dominance of English is beyond all questions both for communication between Europeans themselves and with the rest of the world (Meeuwis, 1994). Having international communities with

thousands of members such as Council of Europe, being the home of European Union, one of the most important parts of NATO and the UN, Europe is where the expansion of English began (Hoffmann, 2000). According to the European Commission's survey of languages (2006), English is the most extensively used foreign language in the European Continent, 38% of which believe that they have "sufficient skills" in English (p. 12).

Naturally, European higher education is no exception to the "Englisation of Europe" (Björkman, 2013). While English medium education is a common fact for British and American colonies, it is also becoming common in Europe to use ELF in higher education (House, 2003). In 1999, European higher education ministers came together and declared the Bologna process. According to this Declaration (1999), it was aimed to promote the cooperation, quality, mobility, attractiveness, and competitiveness of the European Higher Education Area to other parts of the world by adopting a comparable system, including degrees, courses, credits, etc., which is easily recognizable without legal obstacles. Surely, a comparable, attractive and competitive European higher education system would need a common language of instruction and communication more than any other aspect to promote mobility around the world. Especially after declaring the objectives of Bologna process and the fair financial support for implementing them, the European universities became the pioneering environments for the global education by their active agency for foreign students who come from "diverse language backgrounds", and whose lingua franca is "unsurprisingly" English (Smit, 2010, p. 17).

However, it should be noted that the EU has not yet embraced the significance of the English language with its laws and regulations (Cogo & Jenkins, 2010). Cogo and Jenkins (2010) defined this phenomenon as "a mismatch between policy and practice". They stated that the ambiguous position of English in Europe comes from the EU policies based on equal language rights, linguistic diversity and multilingualism. However, it is now crucial for the EU to give English the right status, namely official lingua franca of Europe while promoting linguistic diversity and multilingualism (Cogo & Jenkins, 2010).

2.3 ERASMUS

Every year hundreds of thousands of students study abroad, participating in exchange programmes carried out by different countries and organizations all over the world. ERASMUS (European Region Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students), which is funded by the European Commission, is one of the most successful and influential programmes of them all with its accessible opportunities, high operational efficiency, significant economic and social impacts (European Commission, 2017).

The Erasmus programme was founded in 1987 and began its journey with 3,200 students from 11 European countries including Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, France, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom and has widened its territory with 22 more European countries including Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Hungary, Iceland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Sweden and Turkey (European Commission - Press release, 2017).

In 2014, programmes under education, training, youth and sports activities such as Erasmus, Jean Monnet, Comenius, Erasmus Mundus, Leonardo da Vinci were combined into one single programme and called Erasmus+. Three years after this consolidation, in the year 2017, the Erasmus programme celebrated its 30th anniversary under Erasmus+ programme (European Commission- Fact Sheet, 2017). Erasmus+ aims to support European countries to qualify their institutions' education and training systems in a way that they can put necessary reforms and policies into action, which in return will contribute Europe's social and economic improvement. At an individual level, Erasmus+ supports students, academic and administrative staff to enhance their intercultural awareness, academic and social skills (European Commission, 2017).

Erasmus+ Programme has different action programmes formed by two main frameworks, namely Education, and Training and Youth. Under the framework of Education and training three main actions are supported including Key Action 1, Key Action 2 and Key Action 3 (Erasmus + Programme Guide Version 1, 2018).

Key action 1 is mainly designed for Mobility projects for learners and staff in higher education. Key 2 is about making strategic partnerships, and lastly, Key action 3 provides networks for cooperation with international organisations. (Erasmus+ Programme Guide Version 1, 2018, p.25). Among these three main actions, key Action 1, the participants of which the present study investigated, is particularly important because it enables participants to study or do traineeship between 3 to 12 months in Erasmus+ programme countries (Erasmus+ Programme Guide, 2018), which has a direct effect on the individual level. Especially it has an observable impact on the “perception of cultures, EU values and languages, developed skills and competencies” immediately afterwards the mobilities (National Report of Turkey, 2017, p. 11).

According to European Commission Annual report (2016), “725.000 mobilities” and “21 000 projects” have been carried out by “79.000 organizations” within the framework of Erasmus+ in 2016. The programme has allowed “more than 9.000.000 direct participants” since it was established in 1987 (European Commission- Fact Sheet, 2017). Only from Turkey, which does not hold the full membership of the EU, between the academic years 2004-2017, 458.000 participants attended different actions of Erasmus programme, and the estimated number of 144.500 of this population have studied and/or trained under key Action 1 in different European countries (Erasmus+ Statistics, 2018).

2.3.1 ELF Countries in ERASMUS

Among 33 ERASMUS programme countries, only the United Kingdom, Ireland and partly Malta use English as their official language while other countries, from Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and Turkey all have their own official languages, and use English as the predominantly common language of communication (European Commission, 2012); therefore, the majority of mobilities occur between countries where English is used as a lingua franca.

According to European Commission Annual Report-Statistical Annex (2015), between 2014-2015, the total number of higher education students who studied in a

European higher education institution was 291.383, and 86,3% of them (251.689 students) studied in a European country where English is not the official language. Below Table 1 shows the distribution of numbers in three years period, between 2014-2015, 2015-2016 and 2016-2017.

Between 2015-2016 and 2016-2017, rates of exchanges between non-English speaking countries are, respectively, 86,5% and 86,6% of all (European Commission, 2017, 2018).

The rates are even higher for Turkish students. In the academic years 2014-2015, 2015-2016 and 2016-2017, respectively, 95,8%, 96,3% and 96,7% of ERASMUS outgoing Turkish higher education students studied or trained in a non-anglophone European country (European Commission, 2016, 2017, 2018).

Tables 1 and 2 show the numerical equivalence of the aforementioned rates.

Table 1. The Number of Erasmus Students Who Studied in an Anglophone or Non-Anglophone European Higher Education Institution Between the Academic Years 2014-2015, 2015-2016 and 2016-2017.

European Country	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
Anglophone	39.694	40.946	41.616
Non-anglophone	251.689	262.434	270.731
Total	291.383	303.380	312.347

Note. Erasmus+ Annual Report 2014, 2015, 2016 - Statistical Annex

Table 2. The Number of Turkish Erasmus Students Who Studied in an Anglophone or Non-Aanglophone European Higher Education Institution Between the Academic Years 2014-2015, 2015-2016 and 2016-2017.

European Country	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017
Anglophone	612	593	533
Non-anglophone	14053	15496	15914
Total	14665	16089	16447

Note. Erasmus+ Annual Report 2014, 2015, 2016 - Statistical Annex

As the majority of ERASMUS mobilities occur between non-anglophone European countries where English is used as a lingua franca, and the majority of communications in English takes place between its non-native speakers (Jenkins,

2005), the importance of interaction between non-native speakers of English has become more salient.

In most cases, Erasmus exchange students do need to learn the official language of the host country because “L2 English typically functions as a *lingua franca*” (Llanes et al., 2016, p. 293). This means that while English as an Academic Lingua Franca (EALF) is used for teaching, studying, and doing projects, taking exams, etc.; ELF is used in dormitories, restaurants, supermarkets or any other social context with other international students and the local people. Surely, Erasmus students are exposed to the local language to some extent, but they do not generally use it for their academic studies or socializing with other international students. Given that Erasmus students, who have already enrolled at different departments of their home universities and are on the way of specialising in their field (Engineering, Social Sciences, Medicine, Communication Sciences, etc.), have a limited time to spend in the host countries and institutions (2-12 months), it is natural that they opt for the *lingua franca* communication. They can because English in Europe is a “language of wider communication, functions in various professional domains and used by speakers from all levels of society in practically all walks of life (Seidlhofer et al., 2006, p. 5).

2.3.2 ERASMUS and L2 English Development

A special type of SA context where students reside in a non-native English speaking country and use *lingua franca* English for academic and social purposes have expanded significantly as a result of “globalization, the push for internationalization on campuses across the globe” (Jackson 2013, p. 1), and particularly because of the “present Englishisation of higher education” (Martin-Rubió & Cots, 2018, p. 97). For that reason, classic SA approaches turned out to be insufficient for elucidating the impact of English as a *Lingua Franca* interaction to the general L2 English proficiency development. Thanks to exchange programs such as ERASMUS, students with a variety of L1 backgrounds can participate in these kinds of linguistic investigations (e.g., Kalocsai, 2009; Kaypak & Ortaçtepe, 2014; Köylü, 2016). However, “very little research exists on the effects of SA on learners such as those in the ERASMUS programs” (Collentine, 2009, p. 230). We do not have statistical results which show us effectiveness or ineffectiveness of Erasmus

programme in L2 English learning (Llanes et al., 2016) (eg., Turkish Erasmus students study and socialize via English as a Lingua Franca in Poland).

So far, one of the few researches has been Llanes et al. (2016) who investigated both the developments in L2 English writing of Catalan/Spanish Erasmus students who studied in non-anglophone European countries and whether students' initial L2 English level play a role in their success. While students improved their written lexical complexity likely because of lots of formal and informal practices in English, no significant improvement even decline in written syntactic complexity was found, likely because students did not engage in L2 English writing practice during SA. Also, according to the study, students' initial level of L2 English proficiency had no significant impact on their written lexical and syntactic complexity gains.

Köylü (2016) was another study which investigated 50 Turkish undergraduate students' L2 English oral (fluency and accuracy) and written (lexical and syntactic) development over 16 weeks. The study is peculiar in a way that it compared three learning contexts, namely SA, AH and English as a lingua franca study abroad (ELFSA), with quantitative and qualitative (students' self-reports) assessments. Students were all majoring in English. Both SA and ELFSA group were participants of the Erasmus exchange programme. While the SA group studied in native English-speaking England, the ELFSA group studied in different non-native English-speaking European countries (eg., Finland, Poland, Italy, etc). AH students remained in Turkey and took intensive formal instruction.

The findings of Köylü (2016) suggested that both SA and ELFSA contexts are equally beneficial for oral skills. AH students, on the other hand, were found to improve written fluency more than SA and ELFSA students likely because of relatively more writing requirements of intensive courses in AH context. On written lexical complexity and oral fluency, it was found that practice over time is more determinant than contextual differences. Indeed, in parallel with written lexical complexity and oral fluency results, the major finding of this study was that meaningful practice is more important than learning context for linguistic improvement. The relationship between time spent abroad and language learning was found to be positive in a way that more time spent abroad meant more practice. On the link between students' threshold level and language development, the findings indicated that sufficient pre-SA knowledge leads to more development. The study

concluded that both SA and ELFSA contexts are equally effective for English development as no evidence suggested the superiority of SA over ELFSA.

The author noted that EFLSA has important contextual offerings which promote learning English. First of all, in EFLSA context, mistakes in grammar, pronunciation or any other area do not hinder communication between interlocutors because what is important is conveying the meaning rather than speaking like native-speakers. Secondly, Köylü (2016) suggested that even though EFLSA context provides fewer opportunities to communicate with native speakers than the SA context, L2 interaction in EFLSA is more effective and beneficial in terms of developing strategies for meaningful communication such as accommodation, scaffolding and negotiation. Thirdly, EFLSA context provides a new community of practice for sojourners, where native norms and judgements are not prioritized, therefore help learners develop new linguistic identities with alternative communication strategies, which results in increased interaction, self-confidence and motivation.

Martin-Rubió and Cots (2018) investigated whether oral fluency and accuracy develop, and whether self-confidence in oral skills increases when non-native English speakers study in a lingua franca English environment.

The setting of the study was Denmark, where English is dominantly used by the local people to communicate with people from other nationalities, and by the Danish higher education institutions as the main language of instruction. The students were Catalan who had lower English proficiency than Danish (European Union's proficiency index, 2018; Martin-Rubió & Cots, 2018).

The study found both increased oral skills (fluency and accuracy) and self-confidence. Students self-reports revealed that they attributed their high perceptions of oral improvement in English to both Danish educational methods based on knowledge-construction and learner autonomy as well as Denmark's rich ELF environments.

To sum up, research which investigated whether L2 English improves in the ELF environments of Erasmus programme countries found improved language abilities. Besides, whether it is a classic SA or ELF environment, it was emphasized that meaningful interactions and individual efforts can be indicative for language learning. As is previously stated, research on ELF interaction in the SA context is

scarce; therefore, the present study finds it useful to have a closer look at the nature of NNS-NNS interactions in English in different contexts.

2.3.3 ELF Interactions and L2 English Development

Every year the number of non-native English speakers who study in a country where English is used as a lingua franca in tertiary education grows considerably. Therefore, it is important to investigate lingua franca interaction, and its potential benefits, and problematic areas in terms of L2 English acquisition.

As Meierkord (2000) stated, when people neither have the same mother tongue nor speak each other's mother tongue, they need a third language to communicate, which is called lingua franca. She explained that lingua franca communication has three different dynamics from that of a native speaker-non native speaker (NS-NNS). First of all, each side has its own linguistic and cultural background; hence interferences from their L1 and cultural norms are unavoidable. Secondly, each side is expected to be under the influence of British or American norms as they are exposed to some extent while learning English. Thirdly, despite using it as a vehicle of communication, each side continues to learn English thus represents its level of interlanguage. This being the case, NNS-NNS interaction should be treated as a multi-dimensional issue just as other interaction types. Kachru (1985), for instance, stated that second language learners have different "communicative needs" from that of native speaker norms; therefore, "we have to re-examine our existing notions of 'native speaker' and 'communicative competence' (p. 223, 229).

House (2012) defined ELF as a "special type of intercultural communication where each combination of interactants, each discourse community, negotiates its own lingua franca use in terms of code-switching, discourse strategies, negotiation of forms, and meanings" (p. 1).

Firth (1996) made the conversation analyses (CA) of lingua franca English in Danish business context to understand the way it is constructed. The author stressed the joint construction of "making sense" (p. 256) of the lingua franca interactions is a valuable process for improving language learning abilities in general. Varonis and Gass (1985) examined the conversational interactions between NS-NS, NS-NNS, and NNS-NNS. They concluded that the less the shared background between interlocutors is, the more negotiation of meaning occurs. In other words, NNS-NNS

interactions include more negotiation of meaning as both sides come from different linguistic systems trying to communicate in the third language system. Moreover, when the interlocutors' language status is unequal (eg., NS-NNS), they were observed to avoid negotiation of meaning. The authors also suggested that the “non-threatening” (p. 87) environment of NNS-NNS interactions and the input which becomes more comprehensive during negotiations promote language acquisition.

Seidlhofer and Widdowson (2007) examined the interactions of speakers from different L1s and revealed the creative idiomatic appropriation of ELF users. What was interesting about their findings is that even though the way ELF users accommodate English for their purposes did not fit in native-speaker standards, what the authors called “assembling phrases with recourse to the open-choice principle” (p. 203) worked well for people from diverse language backgrounds.

Borghetti and Beaven (2017) explored students' attitudes and behaviours towards lingua franca interaction in the SA context. Students' self reports revealed that interaction with NNSs is less threatening and more satisfactory than with NSs because the former is easy to understand, free of judgements and stressful situations. During NS-NNS interaction, it is possible that the NS does not understand “the specific nature of the student's (NNS) misunderstandings, errors, hesitations, or implicit metalinguistic questions (Dekeyser 2007, p.11).

Although NNS-NNS interactions have valuable contextual dynamics, they can have some problematic features that can break the communication. Meeuwis (1994), for example, discussed the communicative difficulties which emerge from NNS-NNS interaction. The author mentioned that even though interlocutors may repair grammatical or lexical problems, the pragmatic deficiencies which are transferred from the L1 pose a serious problem because they create misunderstandings and are rarely repaired. As explained by House (1999, 2002), in these kinds of interactions where meaning and consensus are the only priorities, deeper structures or problematic areas can be ignored. Thomas (1984), similarly, asserted that pragmatic failures of NNS-NNS interactions are the main source of miscommunication and are generally neglected. NNSs can use communication strategies incorrectly, and therefore they can be “inappropriately over-assertive or domineering when talking English” (p. 226). Meierkord (2000) summed up some of the salient characteristics of lingua franca English conversation. The corpus she

analyzed revealed that lingua franca speakers preferred “safe topics”, tended to keep conversations “short and superficial”, had “frequent and long pauses” between turns and “restricted themselves to stereotype phrases”. “Simultaneous speech” and “considerable use of politeness” were also observed (para. 27).



CHAPTER 3

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The current study aims to investigate whether Turkish Erasmus exchange students improve their L2 English reading, listening, vocabulary and grammar CEFR proficiency levels significantly during their study in the European ELF context, and whether there is a relationship between these students' initial L2 English reading, listening, vocabulary and grammar proficiency levels and their final proficiency progress.

3.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aims of this study will be discussed by the following questions;

- 1- Do Turkish Erasmus exchange students improve their L2 English reading, listening, vocabulary and grammar CEFR proficiency levels significantly after studying in the European ELF context?
- 2- What is the relationship between Turkish Erasmus exchange students' initial L2 English reading, listening, vocabulary and grammar CEFR proficiency levels and their final proficiency development?

3.3 PARTICIPANTS AND SETTINGS

A total of 140 outgoing Turkish Erasmus exchange students of a large state university in the Marmara region were selected for the present study. See Table 3 and 4 for the complete demographic distribution of the data including faculty, host country, academic level, gender, academic year and age.

Table 3. Demographic Information of the Participants.

Background Information	N	%
Faculty		
Faculty of Aeronautics and Astronautics	8	5.7
Faculty of Communication Sciences	23	16.4

Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences	32	22.9
Faculty of Education	5	3.6
Faculty of Engineering	57	40.7
Other	15	10.7
Host Country		
Bulgaria	2	1.4
Croatia	2	1.4
Czechia	6	4.3
Estonia	4	2.9
Germany	13	9.3
Greece	15	10.7
Holland	2	1.4
Hungary	5	3.6
Italy	3	2.1
Latvia	3	2.1
Lithuania	11	7.9
Poland	32	22.9
Portuguese	3	2.1
Romania	5	3.6
Slovakia	21	15.0
Spain	11	7.9
Other	2	1.4

The participants studied in 18 different non-native English speaking European countries where English is used as a lingua franca for academic and social purposes such as Poland, Italy, Hungary, Holland, etc. They were majoring in 10 different fields such as engineering, education, communication, law, arts, etc. in different academic levels including bachelor' degree, master's degree and Ph.D.

Table 4. Demographic Information of the Participants.

Background Information	N	%
Age		
18-20	46	32.9
21-23	72	51.4
24-26	15	10.7
27-36	7	5.0
Gender		
Female	57	40.7
Male	83	59.3
Degree		
Associate_Degree	1	.7
Bachelor_Degree	124	88.6
Master's_Degree	12	8.6
PhD	3	2.1

Academic Year		
2016-2017	42	30.0
2017-2018	55	39.3
2018-2019	43	30.7

The participants attended the Erasmus exchange programme in the academic years 2016-2017, 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 between 4-12 months (M= 6.17). The current study included 57 female and 83 male students, aged between 18 and 36 (M= 21.78).

Each participant was asked whether they accepted confidential use of their reading, listening, grammar and vocabulary proficiency pre and post OLS test results which were indicated in CEFR levels. Participants were chosen via face to face interview according to the language of OLS, academic courses, communication with other international students and local people in the host country, which were all in English. Faculty, host country, academic level, gender, academic year, age and language background of the participants have no influence for the aim of this study.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND INSTRUMENT

In this study, quasi-experimental one group pre and post-test research design was used to explore the effectiveness of European ELF context in terms of L2 English reading, listening, vocabulary and grammar proficiency development, and the relationship between initial L2 English reading, listening, vocabulary and grammar proficiency level and the final proficiency level. One group pre-post test design is one of the most frequently used quasi-experimental research design in which one group of participants are tested before and after an intervention such as a treatment or manipulation. If the difference between pre and post-test results are significant, the intervention process may be evaluated as the cause of the significant difference (Colman, 2015).

3.4.1 OLS

The present study used the Erasmus+ Online Linguistic Support (OLS) test results as the instrument for gathering data. OLS test is an online language proficiency test, which is financed by the European Commission. The main purpose of the OLS platform is to provide the right preparation and assess the language

development of the Erasmus students before and after the EU mobility. Therefore, it is compulsory for the participants to take the OLS assessment before and after their Erasmus mobility (Erasmus + Programme Guide Version 2, 2018). Although the questions are different, there is no difference between the pre and post- Erasmus+ OLS language assessments in principle. Therefore, one's progress can be measured during his/her Erasmus mobility (Erasmus+, 2018).

The OLS exam is allocated to each participant according to the main language of instruction of the host university by the Erasmus office of the home university. The main language of instruction of the host university is indicated in the Erasmus bilateral agreement which is signed between the home and host university (Erasmus + Programme Guide Version 2, 2017). Before their departure, the participants create an online OLS profile where they enter their dates of studying abroad according to the letter of acceptance they received from the host institution. The OLS system allocates the pre and post-exam at the right time by means of the official period of stay abroad submitted by the students. Neither the pre-departure nor post-mobility test result prevents the participants from taking part in or completing their Erasmus process (Erasmus+ Programme Guide Version 2, 2018).

The OLS exam can be taken in 25 different European official languages including Bulgarian, Czechia, Danish, German, Greek, English, Estonian, Spanish, Finnish, French, Irish Gaelic, Croatian, Hungarian, Italian, Lithuanian, Latvian, Maltese, Dutch, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak, Slovenian, and Swedish. The Participants of the present study took the OLS English online language proficiency test. The assessment includes 20 grammar, 15 vocabulary, 10 listening and 10 reading questions. In the listening part, the participants answer multiple-choice questions or diagnose a word, phrase, communication context, etc. To assess their reading comprehension, the participants are given an authentic text (letter, newspaper, etc.) and are supposed to understand and answer questions based on this text. In the vocabulary section, the participants, based on a given context, answer multiple-choice and open gap-fill questions by identifying the right lexical items. Lastly, in the grammar section, the participants answer multiple-choice and open gap-fill questions for the assessment of their grammatical competence (Erasmus+, 2018).

The OLS exam is the property of Consortium UCL (Université Catholique de Louvain)-ALTISSIA-CLL (Centre de Langues Louvain); therefore, any image, text or similar source will not be shown in the appendix. The results in each skill before and after the Erasmus mobility are indicated in the Common European Framework (CEFR) levels.

3.4.2 CEFR

The present study used Turkish Erasmus exchange programme participants' pre and post-test Online Linguistic Support assessment results which were indicated in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) levels. CEFR provides a universal understanding for explaining languages syllabuses, examinations, assessment, curriculum planning, textbooks, etc. across Europe using intuitive, qualitative and quantitative methods. CEFR also explains levels of language proficiency in a comprehensive way so that learners' progress can be measured and compared across different educational systems (Council of Europe, 2001).

Common European Framework of reference for language learning at all levels aims to;

1. "Promote and facilitate co-operation among educational institutions in different countries
2. Provide a sound basis for the mutual recognition of language qualifications
3. Assist learners, teachers, course designers, examining bodies and educational administrators to situate and coordinate their efforts" (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 5).

CEFR provides six broad levels with descriptive schemes in various language skills as well as general proficiency. These levels are; A1 (Breakthrough), A2 (Waystage), B1 (Threshold), B2 (Vantage), C1 (Effective Operational Proficiency) and C2 (Mastery) (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 23). The present study aimed to explore aforementioned research questions using Turkish Erasmus students' pre and post OLS test of L2 English reading, listening, grammar and vocabulary CEFR levels; therefore, each skill in each level was presented based on Council of Europe's (2001) exact definitions. (see Table 5,6,7 and 8).

Table 5. Common Reference Levels: Overall Listening Comprehension (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 66).

Level	Description
C2	He/she has no challenge in understanding any kind of spoken discourse, whether live or broadcast, even when it is delivered as fast as native speakers.
C1	He/she can understand both abstract and complicated issues even when it is delivered out of his/her field. He/she may additionally need to affirm occasional details, in particular if the accent is atypical. Can understand various idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. Can recognize extended speech even when it is delivered in a complex structure and the relationships are stated vaguely.
B2	He/she can follow a standard and usually encountered spoken language, live or broadcast, whether it is an acquainted or unfamiliar subject about personal, social, educational or professional life. Too much background noise and/or insufficient discourse structure can influence the ability to comprehend. Can comprehend propositionally and linguistically complicated, tangible and abstract speech with standard dialect even when it is a technical discussion in his/her field. As long as the discussion is acceptedly familiar and guided, he/she can understand extended and complex speech.
B1	He/she can apprehend straightforward authentic information about daily or job-related subjects, figuring out main ideas and precise details, only when the speech is clear and the accent is familiar.
A2	He/she can follow basic speech which is about daily survival issues as long as it is clear and slow.
A1	He/she can understand only slow and clearly articulated speeches spending long pauses to figure out the meaning.

Table 6. Common Reference Levels: Overall Reading Comprehension (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 69).

Level	Description
C2	He/she can understand and interpret intensely almost any kind of written language whether it is abstract, concrete, complex or long. He/She can distinguish subtle changes both in style and meaning.
C1	He/she can comprehend extended and complex written discourse including out of field topics. He/she can read difficult parts more than one time.
B2	He/she is an independent reader with the ability to change his/her style and speed based on his/her needs. Can have some difficulty with lexical items which are not used frequently.
B1	He/she can understand straightforward authentic written discourse when it is field-related and gives a sense of comprehension.

A2	He/she can understand short, plain and tangible texts about daily and job-related issues.
A1	He/she can understand short and plain texts quite slowly with the help of basic lexical items and rereading.

Table 7. Common Reference Levels: Overall Vocabulary Range Levels (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 112).

Level	Description
C2	He/she can use a critically wide range of lexical items with the ability to understand the connotative meaning.
C1	He/she can use a wide range of lexical items and compensate for the gaps with indirect usage. Can prefer looking up vocabulary items instead of using strategies but not frequently. Can use idioms and colloquial language well.
B2	He/she has a good command of lexical items when it is field related or about general issues. Can avoid reusing words but still have difficulty with his/her lexical gaps.
B1	He/she has enough vocabulary knowledge about general issues but sometimes needs for circumlocutions.
A2	He/she has enough basic vocabulary knowledge that meets the needs of surviving.
A1	He/she has basic vocabulary knowledge based on isolated words and phrases.

Table 8. Common Reference Levels: Grammatical Accuracy (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 114).

Level	Description
C2	He/She has grammatical control of complex language.
C1	He/She has a high level of grammatical control with minor flaws.
B2	He/She has a high level of grammatical control with some structural problems. However, these problems do not create misunderstandings.
B1	He/She has sufficient grammatical control provided it is a familiar context. Can have an apparent L1 interference but no difficulty with conveying the meaning.
A2	He/She has basic grammatical control but still can convey the main idea.
A1	He/She has limited grammatical control even in familiar contexts.

CHAPTER 4

4. DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS OF RESEARCH QUESTION 1

In order to answer research question 1, which asked whether there is a significant difference between before and after studying in the European ELF context in terms of the participants' L2 English reading, listening, vocabulary and grammar CEFR proficiency levels, the pre and post OLS test results of 140 Turkish Erasmus participants who studied in various non-English speaking countries (shown in Table 3) in the academic years 2016-2017, 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 were gathered with the consent form. Tables 9, 10, 11 and 12 show the frequency of each CEFR level the participants received in reading, listening, vocabulary and grammar before and after their Erasmus exchange programme participation.

Table 9. Number of Participants Based on Their Pre and Post Test Reading Proficiency Level.

Reading Proficiency Level (CEFR)	Pre-test		Post-test	
	N	%	N	%
A1	10	7.1	6	4.3
A2	38	27.1	21	15.0
B1	50	35.7	44	31.4
B2	26	18.6	38	27.1
C1	14	10.0	23	16.4
C2	2	1.4	8	5.7

Note. Reading Proficiency Level before and after Erasmus Mobility

A total of 140 Turkish Erasmus participants took the pre and post OLS reading test. 48.57% of the participants improved their reading comprehension and scored one level (22.8%), two levels (17.1%), three levels (7.1%) and four levels (1.4%) higher in the post-test. 23.57% of the participants received a lower score in the post-test. 15.7% of the whole population dropped by one level, 7.1% dropped by two levels, 0.7% dropped by three levels. 27.8% of the whole population neither improved nor decreased their pre-test reading score and remained at the same proficiency level.

Table 10. Number of Participants Based on Their Pre and Post Test Listening Proficiency Level.

Listening Proficiency Level (CEFR)	Pre-test		Post-test	
	N	%	N	%
A1	15	10.7	14	10.0
A2	36	25.7	29	20.7
B1	49	35.0	36	27.9
B2	28	20.0	35	25.0
C1	9	6.4	12	8.6
C2	3	2.1	11	7.9

Note. Listening Proficiency Level before and after Erasmus Mobility

A total of 140 Turkish Erasmus participants took the pre and post OLS listening test. 42.14% of the whole participants improved their listening skills and scored up to four levels higher. More specifically, 25.7% of the participants scored one level higher, 9.2% of the participants scored two levels higher, 5% of the participants scored three levels higher, and 2.1% of the participants scored four levels higher in the post-test. 26.42% of the participants received a lower listening score in the post-test. 17.8% of the whole population dropped by one level, while 8.5% dropped by two levels. None of the students dropped by three levels. 31.4% of the participants neither improved nor decreased their pre-test listening score and remained at the same level.

Table 11. Number of Participants Based on Their Pre and Post Test Vocabulary Proficiency Level.

Vocabulary Proficiency Level (CEFR)	Pre-test		Post-test	
	N	%	N	%
A1	6	4.3	4	2.9
A2	37	26.4	21	15.0
B1	58	41.4	45	32.1
B2	30	21.4	44	31.4
C1	6	4.3	17	12.1
C2	3	2.1	9	6.4

Note. Vocabulary Proficiency Level before and after Erasmus Mobility

A total of 140 Turkish Erasmus participants took pre and post OLS vocabulary test. 50.71% of the participants improved their vocabulary skills and scored one level (34.2%), two levels (11.4%), three levels (3.5%) and four levels (1.4%) higher in the post-test. 16.42% of the participants received a lower score in the post-test. 13.5% of the whole population dropped by one level, while 1.4% dropped by two levels, and

1.4% dropped by three levels. 32.8% of the participants neither improved nor worsened their pre-test vocabulary score and remained stable.

Table 12. Number of Participants Based on Their Pre and Post Test Grammar Proficiency Level.

Grammar Proficiency Level (CEFR)	Pre-test		Post-test	
	N	%	N	%
A1	6	4.3	2	1.4
A2	38	27.1	27	19.3
B1	59	42.1	66	47.1
B2	34	24.3	40	28.6
C1	3	2.1	2	1.4
C2	0	0	3	2.1

Note. Grammar Proficiency Level before and after Erasmus Mobility

A total of 140 Turkish Erasmus participants took the pre and post OLS grammar test. 35.71% of the participants improved their grammar skills and scored one level (27.8%), two levels (7.1%) and four levels (0.7%) higher in the post-test. None of the students reached three levels higher. 20% of the participants received a lower score in the post-test. 18.5% of the whole population dropped by one level, while 0.7% dropped by two levels, and 0.7% dropped by three levels. 44.2% of the participants neither improved nor decreased their pre-test grammar score and remained the same.

Table 13. Improvement, Stableness and Decrease in Each Skill with Number of Participants.

Skill	Improvement		Stableness		Decrease	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Reading	68	48.5	39	27.8	33	23.5
Listening	59	42.1	44	31.4	37	26.4
Vocabulary	71	50.7	46	32.8	23	16.4
Grammar	50	35.7	62	44.2	28	20.0

As shown in Table 13, the least number of the students who performed better on the post-test compared to the pre-test was seen in grammar, while the highest number was seen in vocabulary. Moreover, only in the vocabulary test, the participants who improved their proficiency level exceeded the total number of participants who lost their initial vocabulary proficiency and remained at the same level. The highest number of students who performed worse on the post-test than the

pre-test was found in listening, while the least number was found in the vocabulary test. In the grammar test, the number of students who remained at the same proficiency level was the highest and also outnumbered the ones who showed progress. In the reading test, students who received the same score in the post-test were fewer than the ones who remained stable in listening, vocabulary and grammar tests.

For the research question 1, data were analyzed using Kolmogorov- Smirnov, Shapiro-Wilk and Wilcoxon signed-rank tests of SPSS 15.0 statistical software. Before the statistical analysis, each CEFR level was given a number from 1 to 6 to proceed in a more comprehensive way. According to the present study, the numerical equivalence of CEFR levels was as follows; A1=1, A2=2, B1=3, B2=4, C1=5, C2=6. Each participant's pre and post-test reading, listening, vocabulary and grammar CEFR levels were transformed into numbers, thus the data could be evaluated in statistical ways.

Table 14. Descriptive Statistics for Pre and Post L2 English Listening, Reading, Grammar and Vocabulary Proficiency Results.

Skill	Pre-test		Post-test	
	Mean	(SD)	Mean	(SD)
Listening	2.92	(1.15)	3.25	(1.36)
Reading	3.01	(1,13)	3.53	(1.21)
Grammar	2.92	(0.87)	3.15	(0.87)
Vocabulary	3.01	(1.01)	3.54	(1.65)

Note. *SD* = standard deviation

To sum up, the descriptive data for the mean pre and post-test as presented in Table 14 indicated that participants improved their proficiency level in each skill.

The data were tested for violations of normality and it was found that the pre and post reading, listening, vocabulary and grammar test results were not normally distributed according to Kolmogorov- Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests ($p < .05$). The results can be seen in Table 15 below.

Table 15. Results of the Tests of Normality for the Pre and Post-test Data.

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Reading pretest	.205	140	.000	.920	140	.000
Reading posttest	.177	140	.000	.936	140	.000

Listening pretest	.187	140	.000	.924	140	.000
Listening posttest	.158	140	.000	.931	140	.000
Vocabulary pretest	.227	140	.000	.901	140	.000
Vocabulary posttest	.179	140	.000	.928	140	.000
Grammar pretest	.218	140	.000	.888	140	.000
Grammar posttest	.250	140	.000	.865	140	.000

Because of the non-parametric distribution of the data, the Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used to see whether participants improved their L2 English reading, listening, vocabulary and grammar CEFR proficiency levels significantly. According to the Wilcoxon signed-rank test results, the participants showed significant improvement in reading [$Z = -4.031, p = .00$], listening [$Z = -2.517, p = .012$], vocabulary [$Z = -4.965, p = .00$] and grammar [$Z = -2.875, p = .004$]. (See table 16).

Table 16. Results of the Wilcoxon signed-rank test for the Pre and Post-test Data.

Skill	Z	P
Reading	-4.031	.00
Listening	-2.517	.012
Vocabulary	-4.965	.00
Grammar	-2.875	.004

4.2 DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS OF RESEARCH QUESTION 2

In order to answer research question 2, which asked whether there is a relationship between Turkish Erasmus exchange students' initial L2 English reading, listening, vocabulary and grammar proficiency level and their final proficiency progress, the same population with the research question 1 was used. The descriptive data for the mean pre-test and the difference between the mean pre and post-test of each skill is shown in Table 17.

Table 17. Mean Pre-Test and the Difference between Mean Pre and Post-Test.

Skill	Mean Pre-test	(SD)	Mean Difference
Listening	2.92	(1.15)	0.33
Reading	3.01	(1,13)	0.52
Grammar	2.92	(0.87)	0.23
Vocabulary	3.01	(1.01)	0.53

Note. SD = standard deviation

The data were checked for normality. Both the participants' initial proficiency levels and their proficiency progress were not normally distributed according to Kolmogorov- Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests ($p < .05$). Results can be seen in Table 18 below.

Table 18. Results of the Tests of Normality for the Pretest and the Difference Between Pre and Post-Test Data.

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Reading pretest	.205	140	.000	.920	140	.000
Reading difference	.157	140	.000	.955	140	.000
Listening pretest	.187	140	.000	.924	140	.000
Listening difference	.174	140	.000	.936	140	.000
Vocabulary pretest	.227	140	.000	.901	140	.000
Vocabulary difference	.181	140	.000	.927	140	.000
Grammar pretest	.218	140	.000	.888	140	.000
Grammar difference	.237	140	.000	.890	140	.000

Therefore, Spearman's correlation coefficient was performed between the participants' pre-test L2 English reading, listening, vocabulary and grammar proficiency level and their proficiency gains during studying in the European ELF context. Spearman's correlation coefficient test revealed that there is a negative relationship between the participants' initial L2 English reading ($p = .000$, $r = -.571$), listening ($p = .000$, $r = -.429$), vocabulary ($p = .000$, $r = -.408$) and grammar ($p = .000$, $r = -.533$) proficiency levels and their overall proficiency progress. In other words, according to the present study, the lower the L2 English initial reading, listening, vocabulary and grammar proficiency level is, the higher the progress can be made during studying in the European ELF context. Results can be seen in Tables 19, 20, 21 and 22 below.

Table 19. Correlations between Initial L2 English Reading Proficiency Level and Overall Reading Proficiency Gain.

			Initial Reading Proficiency Level	Reading Proficiency Gain
Spearman's rho	Initial Reading Proficiency Level	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	1,000 .	-,571(**) ,000
	Reading Proficiency Gain	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	-,571 (**) ,000	1,000 .

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Listwise N = 140

Table 20. Correlations between Initial L2 English Listening Proficiency Level and Overall Listening Proficiency Gain.

			Initial Listening Proficiency Level	Listening Proficiency Gain
Spearman's rho	Initial Listening Proficiency Level	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	1,000 .	-,429(**) ,000
	Listening Proficiency Gain	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	-,429(**) ,000	1,000 .

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Listwise N = 140

Table 21. Correlations between Initial L2 English Vocabulary Proficiency Level and Overall Vocabulary Proficiency Gain.

			Initial Vocabulary Proficiency Level	Vocabulary Proficiency Gain
Spearman's rho	Initial Vocabulary Proficiency Level	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	1,000 .	-,408(**) ,000
	Vocabulary Proficiency Gain	Correlation Coefficient Sig. (2-tailed)	-,408 (**) ,000	1,000 .

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Listwise N = 140

Table 22. Correlations between Initial L2 English Grammar Proficiency Level and Overall Grammar Proficiency Gain.

			Initial Grammar Proficiency Level	Grammar Proficiency Gain
Spearman's rho	Initial Grammar Proficiency Level	Correlation Coefficient	1,000	-,533(**)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	,000
	Grammar Proficiency Gain	Correlation Coefficient	-,533 (**)	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,000	.

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Listwise N = 140

Below figures 2, 3, 4 and 5 show the participants' proficiency gains or loss in each skill based on their pre-programme level.

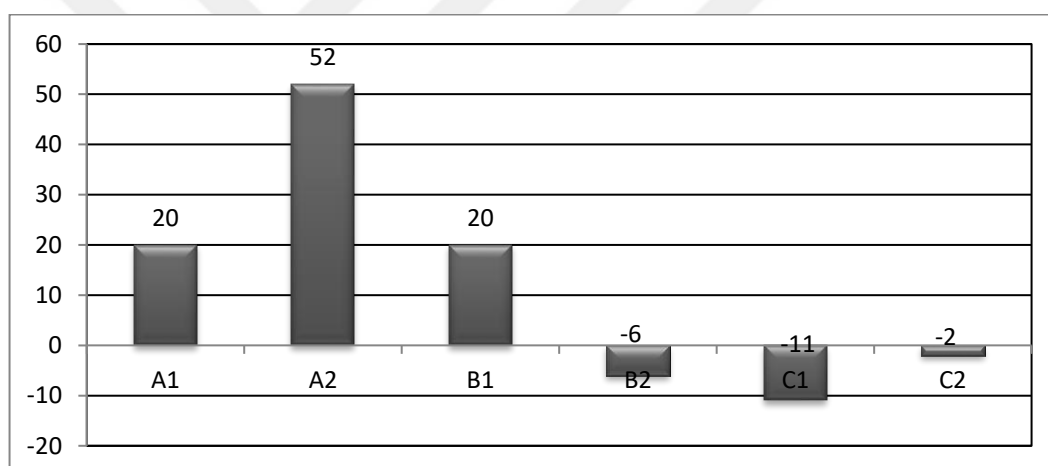


Figure 2. Overall Reading Proficiency Gain or Losses Based on Each Starting Level.

As previously explained, the present study proceeded based on a numerical adaptation. According to this adaptation, a student who scored one CEFR level higher than his/her pre-programme level could gain one point; therefore, one could gain maximum 5 points or lose minimum 5 points. Based on this calculation, as shown in figure 2, while A2 level students progressed more than others, A1 and B1 level students' reading gains were the same. A2 level students gained nearly three times more than A1 and B1 level students. As is also seen, the overall gains of B2, C1 and C2 level students were negative. What happened in each level is explained in detail below.

90% of the participants who were at an A1 level reached higher levels of reading comprehension, while 10% of them remained at the same level. As A1 was the lowest level, there was no possibility to end up in a lower position.

76.3% of the participants who were initially A2 reading proficiency level reached higher levels while 18.4% of them remained the same and 5% of them dropped by one level.

44% of the participants who were initially B1 level improved their proficiency level by one or two levels, while 34% remained the same and 22% dropped by one or two levels.

26.9% of the participants who were initially B2 level improved their proficiency level by one or two levels, while 30.7% remained the same, and 42.30% dropped by one or two levels.

The participants who were initially C1 level showed a decline up to three levels (57.14%) or stableness (35.71%) while only 7.14% of them reached C2 proficiency level. Of all skills tested, the highest improvement rates for the students who were initially A1, A2 and B2 levels, and the lowest improvement rate for the students who were at C1 pre-programme level were seen in the reading test.

The participants who were at the C2 pre-programme level were only two. As C2 is the highest level, there was no possibility to reach any higher level. At the end of their Erasmus mobility, one of them (50%) kept his/her proficiency level and one of them (50%) dropped by two levels.

The participants who received an advanced score (C1-C2) in the post-test were initially B1 level (32.25%), B2 level (22.5%), A2 level (22.5%), C1 level (19.35%) and C2 level (3.2%). 75% of the participants who improved their reading proficiency at least one level were initially A2 and B1 level students. 72.2% of the participants who improved their reading proficiency at least two levels were initially A2 and B1 level students.

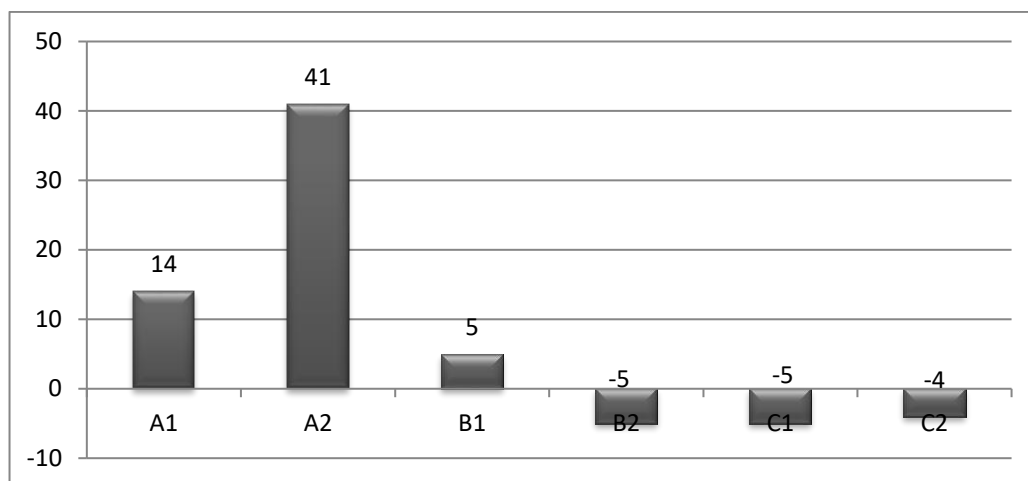


Figure 3. Overall Listening Proficiency Gain or Loss Based on Each Starting Level.

As Figure 3 is shown, initially A1 and A2 level students' listening gains were higher than other students whose starting levels were B1, B2, C1 and C2. A2 level students gained nearly three times more than A1 level and eight times more than B1 level students. As is also seen, the overall listening gains of B2, C1 and C2 level students were negative.

In detail, 60% of A1 listening proficiency level students reached higher levels, while 40% of them remained the same. Of all skills tested, this was the lowest improvement rate for the students who were initially A1 level.

66.6% of the participants who were A2 starting level reached higher levels, while 22.2% remained stable, and 11.1% dropped by one level.

36.73% of the participants who were B1 level improved their proficiency level up to three levels, while 28.57% remained the same, and 34.69% dropped by one or two levels.

21.4% of the participants who were B2 level improved their proficiency level by one or two levels, while 46.4% remained the same, and 32.1% dropped by one or two levels. None of the participants whose sub-test score was B2 dropped by three levels.

55.5% of the participants who were at the C1 level showed one or two levels decline, while half of the rest remained the same (22.2%) or reached C2 level (22.2%).

The number of participants who were at the C2 pre-programme level was only three. At the end of their Erasmus mobility, one of them (33.3%) kept his/her proficiency level and two of them (66.6%) dropped by two levels.

Overall it was seen that the majority of the participants who were initially B1, B2, C1, and C2 levels could not improve their listening proficiency. Participants who received an advanced score (C1-C2) in the post-test were initially A2 level (30.4%), B2 level (26.08%), B1 level (21.7%), C1 level (17.3%) and C2 level (4.3%) students. 71.1% of the participants who improved their listening proficiency at least one level were initially A2 and B1 level students. 69.5% of the participants who improved their listening proficiency at least two levels were initially A1 and A2 level students.

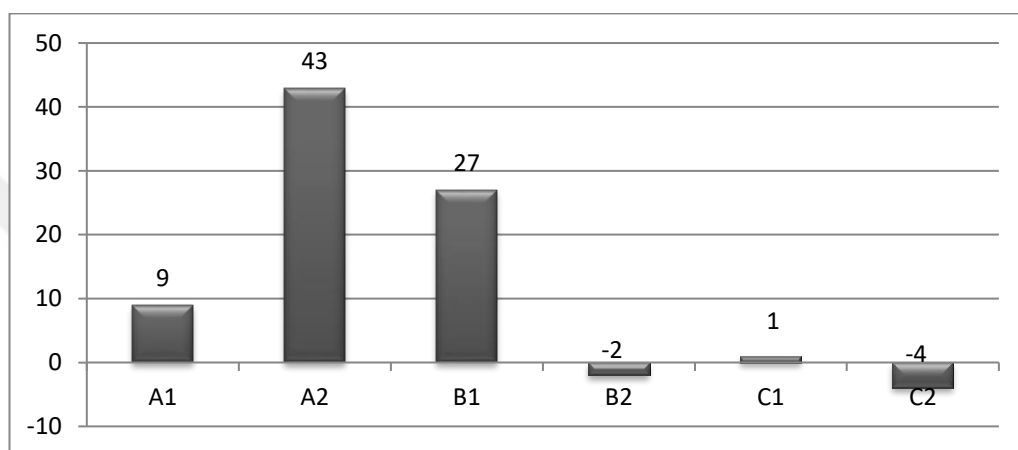


Figure 4. Overall Vocabulary Proficiency Gain or Loss Based on Each Starting Level.

As shown in Figure 4, initially A2 and B1 level students' vocabulary gains were higher than the other students whose starting levels were A1, B2, C1 and C2. A2 and B1 level students gained respectively three and almost five times more than A1 level students. As is also seen, while the overall gains of B2 and C2 level students were negative, the C1 level was positive.

66.6% of the participants who were initially A1 level reached higher levels of vocabulary knowledge, while 33.3% remained the same.

72.9% of the participants who were initially A2 vocabulary proficiency level reached higher levels, while 24.3% remained the same and only 2.7% dropped by one level.

48.2% of the participants who were initially B1 level improved their vocabulary proficiency up to three levels, while 37.9% remained the same, and 13.7% dropped by one level. Of all skills tested, this was the highest improvement rate for students who were initially B1 level. In reading and listening, drops were

seen up to two levels for the participants whose initial level was B1, but in vocabulary, this was only one level.

26.6% of the participants who were initially B2 level showed one or two levels of improvement while half of the rest remained the same (36.6%) or dropped by three levels (36.6%). Three levels decline in this level (B2) was not seen in reading and listening.

The participants who were initially C1 were only 6. At the end of their Erasmus mobility, half of them (50%) reached C2 proficiency level, and the remaining three either kept their advanced status (10%) or dropped by one level (40%). Of all skills tested, this was the highest improvement rate for students who were initially C1 level.

The participants who were initially C2 level (N=3) showed a decline up to three levels (66.6%) or kept their advanced status (33.3%). 57.6% of the participants who received an advanced score (C1-C2) in the post-test were initially independent users (B1 and B2), while the rest were shared equally by initially basic and advanced users.

77.4% of the participants who improved their vocabulary proficiency at least one level were initially A2 and B1 level students. 78.2% of the participants who improved their vocabulary proficiency at least two levels were again initially A2 and B1 level students.

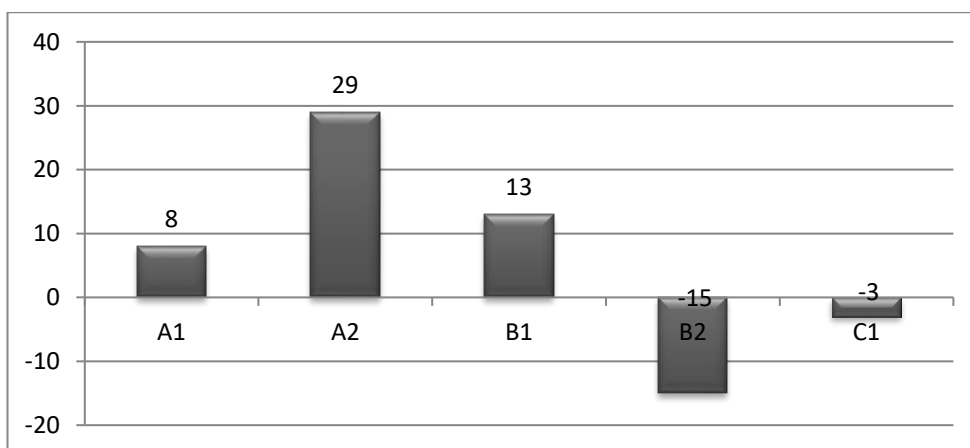


Figure 5. Overall Grammar Proficiency Gain or Loss Based on Each Starting Level.

As Figure 5 shows, initially A2 and B1 level students' grammatical gains were higher than other students whose starting levels were A1, B2, C1 and C2. A2 and B1

level students gained respectively more than three and almost two times more than A1 level students. As is also seen, the overall gains of B2 and C1 level students were negative. Below, what happened in each starting level is explained in detail.

83.3% of the participants who were initially A1 level reached higher levels of grammatical competence, while 16.6% remained the same. This improvement rate at A1 level was the second highest one (Reading = 90%, Listening = 60%, Vocabulary = 66.6%).

55.2% of the participants who were initially A2 grammar proficiency level showed improvement up to four levels higher, while 42.10% remained the same, and only 2.6% dropped by one level.

28.8% of the participants who were initially B1 level improved their proficiency level, while 57.1% remained the same and 12.5% dropped by one level. These were both the lowest improvement and drop rates for the participants whose initial levels were A2 and B1. In other skills, it was seen that initially B1 level students showed improvement up to three levels; however, in grammar, the same level students could reach only one level higher. On the other hand, in reading and listening, drops were seen up to A1 for initially B1 level students, while this was only one level in grammar.

Only 8.8% of the participants who were initially B2 level reached advanced levels, while 52.9% dropped by one or two levels and 38.2% remained at the same level. This was the lowest improvement rate (Reading= 26.9%, Listening= 21.4%, Vocabulary= 26.6%) and highest drop rate (Reading= 42.3%, Listening= 32.1%, Vocabulary= 36.6%) for initially B2 level students.

The participants who were initially C1 were only 3. At the end of their Erasmus mobility, 33.3% of them reached C2 proficiency level and the rest dropped by two and three levels (66.6%).

Different from the other sections, in grammar test, no participant received C2 initial proficiency level. 50% of the participants who received an advanced score (C1-C2) in the post-test were initially B2 level students, while the rest was shared equally by initially basic (A1-A2) and advanced (C1-C2) users.

82% of the participants who improved their grammar proficiency at least one level were initially A2 and B1 level students. 90.9% of the participants who improved their grammar proficiency at least two levels were initially A1 and A2

level students. This was the highest improvement rate of low-level students who progressed more than one level (Reading= 66.6%, Listening= 69.5%, Vocabulary= 60.8%).



CHAPTER 5

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The present study aimed to explore the effect of studying in the European ELF context on L2 English reading, listening, grammar and vocabulary proficiency development, and the relationship between participants' initial L2 English reading, listening, vocabulary and grammar proficiency level and their final proficiency improvement in these skills.

In this respect, the study asked the following research questions;

- 1- Do Turkish Erasmus exchange students improve their L2 English reading, listening, vocabulary and grammar CEFR proficiency level significantly after studying in the European ELF context?
- 2- What is the relationship between Turkish Erasmus exchange students' initial L2 English reading, listening, vocabulary and grammar CEFR proficiency level and their final proficiency development?

The present study used Erasmus+ Online Linguistic Support (OLS) results as the only instrument for data collection. A total of 140 outgoing Turkish Erasmus exchange students of a large state university in the Marmara region were the participants of the present study. The data were analyzed quantitatively through a quasi-experimental one group pre-post test research design. Descriptive statistics, Wilcoxon signed-rank and Spearman's correlation coefficient tests of SPSS 15.0 statistical software were the main tools which the present study used to explore the aforementioned research questions.

In this chapter, the results presented in the previous chapter will be discussed in light of the studies reviewed in the literature section. Conclusions, pedagogical implications and limitations of the present study as well as suggestions for further studies will also be discussed in this chapter.

5.2 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

5.2.1 Discussion of Findings Referencing Research Question 1

“Do Turkish Erasmus exchange students improve their L2 English reading, listening, vocabulary and grammar CEFR proficiency level significantly after studying in the European ELF context?”

The findings showed that participants improved their L2 English listening [$Z=-2.517$, $p=.012$], reading [$Z=-4.031$, $p=.00$], grammar [$Z=-2.875$, $p=.004$] and vocabulary [$Z=-4.965$, $p=.00$] CEFR levels significantly. The level of significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

Analysis of quantitative data gathered from the Turkish Erasmus students' (N=140) pre and post-test L2 English reading OLS test results showed that the participants' overall mean score for pre and post-test results increased 0.52 (Mean pre test= 3.01, Mean post test= 3.53) point and they improved their reading skills in statistically significant ways ($p=.00$), confirming the findings of previous studies that have found significant improvement in L2 reading skills after spending one or two terms in the SA context (Brecht et al., 1995; Lapkin et al., 1995; Huebner, 1995; Iwasaki, 2007; Kinginger, 2008; Savage & Hughes, 2014; Watson et al., 2013).

However, detailed analysis of the data showed that while 23.5% (N=33) of the participants showed a decline in their L2 English reading CEFR levels, 27.8% (N=39) showed neither an improvement nor a decline. In other words 51.3% of the participants showed no improvement in their L2 English reading OLS test performance. Although the present study needs qualitative data for confirmation, it can be suggested that the status of formal instruction in the host institutions (Iwasaki, 2007), the degree of academic reading and writing in L2 (Isabelli & Nishida, 2005), and existence or lack of teacher contact (Dewey, 2004) might have affected participants' reading performances because some institutions offer project-based courses to Erasmus students rather than pencil and paper type courses where formal instruction and reading materials are used intensely. In this respect, the participants who had to read more books, internet resources or any kind of reading materials to pass the courses were likely to gain more reading comprehension than participants who mostly depended on discussions and/or cooperative works. Dewey's (2004)

suggestion that an intensive course at home context (IM) can be as beneficial as SA context also explains the importance of formal instruction and teacher influence in terms of reading development.

Listening skills are accepted as one of the fundamental skills for a successful L2 acquisition (Saville-Troike, 2006). The analysis of quantitative data gathered from the Turkish Erasmus students' (N=140) pre and post-test L2 English listening OLS test results showed that the participants' overall mean score for pre and post-test results increased 0.33 (Mean pre test= 2.92, Mean post test= 3.25) point and they improved their listening skills in statistically significant ways ($p=.012$), which resonates with the previous studies that have found significant improvement in L2 listening skills after spending one or two terms in the SA context (Allen & Herron, 2003; Dyson, 1988; Kinginger, 2008; Llanes & Muñoz, 2009; Willis et al., 1977).

This finding is likely due to more “opportunities for bi-directional practice of listening in social interaction in which cognitive and meta-cognitive strategies are at play” (Beatti et al., 2014, p. 211) and academic tasks related to listening comprehension (Kinger, 2008). Also, students who tend to apply bottom-up listening strategies might have gradually improved their top-down listening strategies during studying abroad, which may give a chance to progress (Cubillos et al., 2008).

On the other hand, it was seen that while 26.4% (N=37) of the participants' initial listening proficiency level declined, 31.4% (N=44) remained unchanged. In other words 57.8% of the participants showed no aural progress according to OLS post listening test. Given that the participants attended courses which were instructed in English, communicated with the other international students and the students of the host institution in English; it is unlikely to foresee a decrease or stableness in the participants' listening performance. This finding may be attributed to the online testing conditions in which the participants can have technical problems. In an interactive testing environment, the participants could yield higher aural performances (Cubillos et al., 2008). Also, relying only upon test scores to see one's linguistic progress can lead to problematic results (Freed, 1998). Above all, from a qualitative perspective, not all of the students who studied abroad fully benefit from the linguistic opportunities provided inside and out-of-class (Mendelson, 2004) and show expected linguistic progress.

The analysis of quantitative data gathered from the Turkish Erasmus students (N=140) pre and post-test L2 English vocabulary OLS test results showed that the participants' overall mean score for pre and post-test results increased by 0.53 (Mean pre test= 3.01, Mean post test= 3.54) point, and they improved their vocabulary skills in statistically significant ways ($p = .00$), confirming the findings of previous studies that have found significant improvement in L2 vocabulary skills after spending one or two terms in the SA context (Conroy, 2018; Grey et al., 2015; Ife et al., 2000; Llanes & Muñoz, 2009; Milton & Meara, 1995).

As Table 11 has shown, the highest number of students who performed better on the post-test than pre-test was seen in the vocabulary test. Moreover, only in the vocabulary test, the participants who improved their proficiency level exceeded the total number of the participants who lost their initial vocabulary proficiency and remained at the same level. This finding can be explained by classroom instruction and engaging in various social networks of SA context (Dewey, 2008) because whether it is an interactive or non-interactive environment, being exposed to lexical input is inevitable. More specifically, through interactions students may have retrieved individual words (Collentine, 2004), no matter how effectively they used them in complex sentences thus enriched their vocabulary repertoire. Additionally, as House (2012) stated, ELF communication enables each interlocutor to communicate in his/her discourse strategies, way of negotiation, code-switching, etc. Therefore, it can be suggested that the process of "making sense" between NNSs (Firth, 1996) when being free of fitting in native speakers standards (Seidlhofer & Widdowson, 2007), may become less threatening and more satisfactory than interacting with NSs (Borghetti & Beaven, 2017), and ultimately foster vocabulary improvement.

On the other hand, while 16.4% (N=23) of the participants' vocabulary score dropped by one or more levels, 32.8% (N=46) showed neither an improvement nor a decline. In other words, 49.2% of the participants showed no improvement in their vocabulary performance. Although the present study needs qualitative data for confirmation, one possible explanation for 49.2% of the participants who showed no improvement could be the significant correlation between the amount of time spent in speaking, listening, reading, writing and the vocabulary progress found by Dewey (2008). In other words, participants who did not show vocabulary improvement may

have spent less time in speaking, listening, reading and writing than the ones who showed progress.

The analysis of quantitative data gathered from the Turkish Erasmus students (N=140) pre and post-test L2 English grammar OLS test results showed that the participants' overall mean score for pre and post-test results increased by 0.23 (Mean pre test= 2.92, Mean post test= 3.15) point and they improved their grammatical competence in statistically significant ways ($p=.004$). This finding matches with the previous research that has found significant improvement in L2 grammar skills after spending one or two terms in the SA context (Grey et al., 2015; Isabelli, 2004; Isabelli & Nishida, 2005; Juan–Garau, 2014).

It can be suggested that students who showed grammatical improvement have enjoyed some of the advantages of SA context such as academic reading and writing in L2, high quality of contextualized input, interacting in authentic situations, using L2 syntactically and semantically in a more expressive way, strengthening meaning-form association to be able to express the intended meaning (Isabelli & Nishida, 2005).

However, the detailed analysis of the data showed that while 20% (N=28) of the participants showed a decline in their L2 English grammar CEFR levels, 44.28% (N=62) showed neither an improvement nor a decline, and, of all four skills tested, grammar was the least improved one. The fact that 64.28% of the participants showed no grammatical progress is in line with the research that has found little or no grammatical advantage for the SA context (Collentine, 2004; DeKeyser, 1986, 1991; Möhle & Raupach, 1983).

Previously, it was mentioned that intercultural communication between ELF speakers has its own characteristics (House, 2012), and this could be the reason why vocabulary was the most improved area for the present study. It is possible that the very same reason may have impeded the grammatical development (Higgs & Clifford, 1982) of the majority of the students because L2 communities such as SA contexts when they are rule and feedback-free can cause fossilization and decline in grammatical accuracy (Krashen & Seliger, 1975).

5.2.2 Discussion of Findings Referencing Research Question 2

“What is the relationship between Turkish Erasmus exchange students’ initial L2 English reading, listening, vocabulary and grammar CEFR proficiency level and their related L2 English proficiency development?”

The findings indicated that there is a negative relationship between the participants’ initial L2 English reading ($p=.000$, $r=-.571$), listening ($p=.000$, $r=-.429$), vocabulary ($p=.000$, $r=-.408$) and grammar ($p=.000$, $r=-.533$) proficiency level and their overall final proficiency gains. Of all skills tested, initially A2 level students showed the most improvement. These results resonate with the findings of previous studies (Carroll, 1967; Dı’az-Campos, 2004; Freed, 1995, 1998; Lapkin et al., 1995; Llanes & Mun˜oz, 2009; Llanes, 2011; Teichler & Maiworm, 1996) which found more progress for low-level students in general.

To begin with, in the reading test, while A2 level students gained nearly three times more than A1 and B1 level students, initially A1 and B1 level students’ overall gains were the same with respectively 90% and 44% of improvement rate. The overall reading gains of B2, C1 and C2 level students were negative. This finding matches with the results of Brecht et al. (1995) and Lapkin et al. (1995) which indicated that participants with low-level reading proficiency progressed more compared to the advanced ones.

In listening, A1 and A2 level students’ gains were higher than other students whose initial levels were B1, B2, C1, and C2. A2 level students gained nearly three times more than A1 level and eight times more than B1 level students. The overall listening gains of B2, C1 and C2 level students were negative. This finding was previously supported by Dyson (1988) and Lapkin et al. (1995) which found greater listening gains for the weaker students.

In the vocabulary test, A2 and B1 level students’ vocabulary gains were higher than other students whose initial levels were A1, B2, C1, and C2. A2 and B1 level students gained respectively three and almost five times more than A1 level students. While the overall gains of B2 and C2 level students were negative, the C1 level was positive for the first time. These findings fall between the previous studies which found that SA is beneficial for the vocabulary improvement of low level (Milton & Meara, 1995) and intermediate/advanced level students (Ife et al., 2000).

Similarly, A2 and B1 level students' grammatical gains were higher than other students whose initial levels were A1, B2, C1, and C2. A2 and B1 level students gained respectively more than three and almost two times more than A1 level students. The overall gains of B2 and C1 level students were negative. In this respect, previous research which found a strong relationship between advanced pre-programme grammatical competence and the progress made in the SA context (e.g., Grey et al., 2015; Isabelli, 2004; Isabelli & Nishida, 2005; Juan-Garau, 2014; Lennon, 1990) conflict with the present study. Davidson's (2007) and Dekeyser's (2007, 2010) findings that some level of pre-program declarative knowledge could yield progress more in general also seem compatible with the current vocabulary and grammar results.

To sum up, in the vocabulary and grammar tests, the participants who began their Erasmus experience with A2 (low level) and B1 (intermediate level) L2 English proficiency level made the most progress after spending one or two terms in the European ELF context. On the other hand, in the listening and reading tests, students with A1 and A2 pre-programme level (both are low levels) progressed more than other students. In this respect, the findings suggest that having some pre-programme L2 English knowledge above the beginner level and below upper-intermediate and advanced level leads to more progress in vocabulary and grammar skills. The findings also suggest that low-level students make the most progress in reading and listening skills. From another perspective, the findings indicate that majority of the students who were at the Vantage (B2) and Effective Operational Proficiency (C1) sub-test L2 English levels either remained stable or went back home with lower proficiency levels after spending one or two terms in the European ELF context.

In all skills tested, overall gains of Vantage (B2), Effective Operational Proficiency (C1) and Mastery (C2) level students were negative (Total improvement of initially B2, C1 and C2 level students in Reading=-19, Listening=-14, Vocabulary=-5 and Grammar=-15). Declines among students who were initially advanced (C1 and C2) or upper-intermediate (B2) levels have been higher in reading and grammar than in listening and vocabulary. Although reading was the second most improved skill area (the first one was vocabulary), this finding indicated that it was also the area where the sharpest falls from the high levels occurred.

On explaining the proficiency loss in reading and grammar, the previous research which found lack of or slight grammatical and reading improvement as a result of SA experience (Collentine, 2004; DeKeyser, 1986, 1991; Dewey, 2004; Dewey, 2008; Freed, 1995; Iwasaki, 2007) might not be directly referenced because actually the loss of proficiency has been an unprecedented finding. However, what these studies have commonly emphasized is that reading and grammar skills improve with a controlled and intensive language exposure where teacher contact is sufficient such as in immersion programs (IM). A substantial immersion experience is necessary otherwise SA context itself may not necessarily be indicative (Davidson, 2007). In other words, the intensity of learning can be more important than the location of learning (Dewey, 2004, 2008; Freed et al., 2004; Serrano et al., 2011).

The participants, throughout their stay in abroad, while interacting with other international students, professors or local people, are exposed to different versions of English because multilingual speakers may adopt their own form to convey meaning successfully (Seidlhofer, 2004). As explained by House (1999, 2002), in these kinds of interactions where meaning and consensus are the only priorities, deeper structures or problematic areas can be ignored. Therefore, participants in the present study might have difficulty in coping with the structural requirements of reading and especially grammar tests. At this point, it can also be suggested that high-level students interacted more (Brecht and Robinson, 1993), thus they were exposed to multiple forms of English more than low and pre-intermediate level students. Ultimately, the majority of them, on their return to the home country, might have reflected their non-standardised English knowledge in the post-OLS test which is based on standard English.

Decrease in some participants' reading and grammar proficiency level may be attributed to the very nature of ELF interactions between multilingual speakers and the lack of formal and controlled classroom environments in some of the host institutions, which could be intentionally allocated to international students in order to highlight more relaxed cultural and social learning environments. At least, this might be one of the reasons why initially

high-level students' loss of vocabulary proficiency was not as much as their loss of proficiency in reading and grammar.

Declines among students who were initially advanced (C1 and C2) or upper-intermediate (B2) levels have been the lowest in the vocabulary test. Yet the question remains for some of the participants', especially the advanced ones', listening and vocabulary drops. Given that these students had sufficient pre-program knowledge (B2, C1 and C2) and a vast amount of lexical and audial exposures to English both in social, academic, interactive and non-interactive environments; one wonders how the loss of lexical and audial proficiency can be possible. Kinginger (2008) asked the same question and eventually noted that;

“This complex mystery is difficult to solve using quantitative measures of student activity or surface-level characterizations of their personal attributes alone. Instead, the interpretation of these findings depends in large part on achieving an understanding of the study-abroad experience: the kinds of access to social interactive settings that students are in fact able to negotiate and the dispositions that these students adopt with respect to living abroad, encountering others, and learning the language. It is about who did what, when, where, with whom, and how, and most importantly, in response to what motives” (p. 59).

At this point, it should be emphasized that individual differences and environmental factors can be as significant as well known benefits of SA context in terms of language learning. Indeed, the effect of individual differences may intensify particularly during study abroad experience (Huebner, 1995) and determine the quality of our learning process cognitively or psychologically (Sanz, 2014).

Age (Llanes, 2011), learning styles, degree of motivation, language aptitude (Freed, 1998), attitudes towards the target language and culture (Allen, 2010), self-perception of development, self-confidence and personal characteristics (Llanes et. al., 2012) may affect the degree of language learning in the SA settings. Language aptitude, for example, which makes the learner look for more opportunities inside and outside the classroom for language use (Freed, 1990) and put more on what he knows already with the new input and practice (DeKeyser, 2010), is one of the key individual factors for language development.

In addition to individual differences, “the nature of the interactions and the quality of the experiences” (Freed et al., 2004, p. 298), the amount of L2 contact (Llanes et al., 2012), time spent abroad, pre- programme language competence, language of instruction in academic courses, context of academic work, accommodation types of participants and the degree of guidance for intercultural and experiential learning (Engle & Engle, 2003), which are combined in different ways in each study abroad programme, might be other explanations why participants of the present study went back home with different outcomes.

5.3 CONCLUSION

This study investigated the effectiveness of studying in a non-English speaking European country where English is used as a lingua franca on Turkish Erasmus students’ L2 English reading, listening, vocabulary and grammar proficiency development and the role participants’ pre-programme proficiency level (in each skill) plays in their final proficiency progress.

The contributions of this study to the exchange programmes which are based on ELF interactions are twofold. Firstly, it was shown that the participants improved their reading, listening, vocabulary and grammar English proficiency levels significantly after studying one or two terms in the European ELF context.

The study also revealed unprecedented results that in reading, listening and grammar more than half of the students were unable to improve their pre-programme language proficiency and, even, one out of every 5 participants on average received lower scores in the post-test after an average of 6 months academic and social ELF experience in Europe. In the vocabulary test, one out of every 2 participants could not improve (remained stable or declined) their initial proficiency level, and one out of every 10 went back home with lower scores. At this point, one of the factors that affected this seemingly non-progressive SA process might be the participants’ pre-program L2 knowledge; therefore, the present study considered it necessary to examine the relationship between students’ initial proficiency level and their final proficiency progress.

Secondly, pre-programme low (A2) and intermediate level (B1) students progressed more than upper-intermediate (B2) and advanced ones (C1 and C2). In other words, although the findings supported that lower students progress more in

general in the SA context, detail analysis showed that some pre-programme declarative knowledge is required. According to the results, in each skill tested, the majority of the students who received lower scores in the post-test were initially high-level students.

Declines and stableness in the post-test scores of initially high-level students were important for the present study and the SA research in terms of the issues they might indicate, namely dynamics of ELF interactions, individual differences and environmental factors. ELF interactions have multicultural dynamics, and these dynamics can improve students' language construction processes but can conflict with the expectations of a standard English test. Individual differences and environmental factors can influence language learning processes and outcomes. Therefore, both the way ELF interactions are perceived at the individual level and language learning is supported at the environmental level can bring explanations to not showing improvement in a standard English test after staying one or two terms in a European ELF environment as an Erasmus exchange student.

5.4 PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The present study has important pedagogical implications for language learners and teachers, exchange programmes in general and programmes such as Erasmus in which lingua franca interactions influence the participants' linguistic outcomes.

One of the major findings of the study showed that the Turkish Erasmus participants improved their reading, listening, vocabulary and grammar English proficiency level significantly after studying one or two terms in the European ELF context. Therefore, stakeholders should consider that ELF environments can be beneficial for English language development. Teachers may also consider integrating not only native norms but also the learners' language into the classroom so that they can avoid monolingual biases and help students develop their own communication strategies.

The long-held belief that "speaking is the most problematic area for the Turkish students" may derive from educators' native-like judgements. Therefore, educators might consider any kinds of meaning construction process and outcome valuable, so that they can provide language learners with the necessary support, and thus help them be autonomous learners. If an Erasmus student can survive his/her

academic and social duties by using lingua franca English in a non-anglophone country, teachers and other stakeholders might consider this as a piece of evidence for the importance of language learning strategies.

Another major finding revealed that low (A1-A2) and intermediate level students (B1) made greater gains compared to upper-intermediate (B2) and advanced students (C1 and C2). In this respect, low-level students particularly might be guided to attend exchange programmes in order to improve their language proficiency. Also, this finding may derive from the motivational differences between low and high-level students. Students with low-level English language proficiency and language learning motivation might consider interacting in the environments where native-like language production is not prioritized and English is used as a lingua franca. On the other hand, high-level students might consider studying particularly in the anglophone countries. In the same vein, educators might consider using different methods for low and high-level students based on their motivational differences to boost their language proficiency.

Last but not least, educational policies pursued by the countries or SA programme organizers can play an important role in the participants' language learning. Major findings of the present study may be a guide for the European Commission or any other SA programme organizers in order to strengthen their language policies and provide appropriate linguistic support to their participants.

5.5 LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

There are various limitations that, if taken into consideration, the present study would yield more detailed explanations for its findings. First of all, the participants of the present study were Turkish Erasmus Exchange students of a state university in the Marmara region; therefore, the findings can not be generalized and transferred to the other Erasmus participants and different exchange programmes. Thus, a multinational design including different exchange programmes might bring a deeper understanding to the linguistic outcomes of English as a lingua franca interactions.

The OLS test has its limitations in itself. For instance, the result of the test does not restrict the participants beginning or completing their Erasmus process, therefore we do not know how seriously the participants take the test. The pre and post OLS

test scores would have been more reliable, if they were more restrictive and determinant.

The current study has not got a control group such as at-home students and/or native-English speaking country participants; therefore, it cannot be confidently said that the present findings would not be the same in other contexts. A comparative design might show both the linguistic outcomes of other contexts and soundness of the attributions that the present study made in regards to European ELF context.

The relationships between the four skills tested have not been taken into consideration for the present study. To exemplify, participants' grammatical progress and its relationship with other skills generally remained untouched with some exceptions. A comparative investigation might explain whether progress or decline in a particular skill is related to the improvement or failure in other skills.

SA is especially beneficial for oral improvement in which individual differences are not as determinant as they are in other skills (Kinginger, 2008). OLS assessment does not include speaking skills; therefore, we do not know how well students improved the way they communicate in terms of fluency, accuracy or other oral parameters. Exploring the participants' oral progress would shed light on one of the most crucial aspects of ELF context.

One of the important aspects to consider was the length of stay abroad because individual differences such as motivation, attitude, self-confidence, learning styles and more would change over time depending on the environmental factors such as academic courses, social network, and so forth. In this respect, research considering the participants' length of stay in ELF environments might bring an explanation to whether time shapes L2 progress and, if it shapes at all, which skills are more sensitive to its influence.

This study is limited to European ELF context, however, the host countries where students study and live for a period of time have their own language, culture and attitudes towards ELF. Future research may also consider comparing L2 English improvement in different European countries because while some of them speak English dominantly in their daily lives such as Denmark, some include residents with relatively low English proficiency (European Union's proficiency index, 2018).

Another major limitation is that the study has not got qualitative instruments. Research which combines the qualitative instruments such as individual differences,

self-perceptions or pre-SA beliefs, and so on. with quantitative instruments might interpret their findings more holistically because SA is already a holistic experience itself.

Intercultural, socio-cultural and pragmatic competence also have not been measured in the present study. It is advisable to conduct further research to answer critical questions such as whether studying in the European ELF context enables learners to convey meaning in a given context in L2 English and to communicate with people from other cultures and social groups in a constructive way.

The present study did not take in to account the demographic factors such as age, gender, study cycle, the field of study, GPA, etc. A study comparing such demographic factors might bring multifaceted explanations for the participants' linguistic experiences because such factors can determine the attitudes towards both the target language and culture, motivation, academic load, academic achievement, etc.

Last but not least, pre-SA knowledge was considered as the starting point for the present study, however, it is a well-known fact that some students attend language courses or get involved in various pre-program language preparations in order to achieve more academically and/or socially in the SA context. Therefore, an interesting topic for further research can be the impact of pre-programme linguistic activities on Erasmus participants' final linguistic progress in the ELF context.

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