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THE IMPACT OF ERASMUS+ PARTICIPATION ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF MOLDOVAN STUDENTS

ВЛИЯНИЕ УЧАСТИЯ В ПРОГРАММЕ ERASMUS+ НА УРОВЕНЬ ВЛАДЕНИЯ АНГЛИЙСКИМ ЯЗЫКОМ И АКАДЕМИЧЕСКУЮ УСПЕВАЕМОСТЬ МОЛДАВСКИХ СТУДЕНТОВ

CARAPIREA Anna, studentă, specialitatea: Drept
MARCIUC Sofia, studentă, specialitatea: Drept
Academia de Studii Economice din Moldova, Republica Moldova,
Chișinău, str. Mitropolit Gavriil Bănulescu-Bodoni 61, www.ase.md
e-mail autori: anna.carapirea.uxsq@ase.md
sofia.marciuc.6dbi@ase.md

Аннотация: *Данное исследование посвящено анализу влияния участия в программе Erasmus+ на уровень владения английским языком и академическую успеваемость студентов Молдовы. Исследование основано на опросе 77 студентов Молдавской Экономической Академии и направлено на изучение их осведомлённости, интереса, ожиданий и возможных барьеров участия в программе. Результаты показывают умеренный уровень заинтересованности студентов, при этом большинство ожидает улучшения языковых навыков и академических результатов. Вместе с тем выявлены основные трудности: недостаточный уровень английского языка, финансовые ограничения и проблемы адаптации. Сделан вывод о значительном потенциале программы Erasmus+ при условии создания необходимых условий поддержки студентов.*
Ключевые слова: *Erasmus+, студенческая мобильность, владение английским языком, академическая успеваемость, высшее образование, Молдова, международные программы.*
JEL CLASSIFICATION: H5, F10, H7, I3, P16.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization introduces an array of challenges for various institutions. For institutions for postsecondary education, they have had to include an international component to how they teach students. As international relations expand, so does student mobility. A clear example of this is the Erasmus+ program (Daly, 2009).

The years 2021 to 2027 see the European Union's expanded Erasmus+ programs. These aim to further integration of the union's education, training, youth, and sports (Grieder, 2023).

The priority of the program is the academic mobility of individuals and groups, resulting in enhanced education and training. It also promotes social participation and informal learning by encouraging active engagement in education among youth from diverse nations. Erasmus+ aims to enhance sports performance at all levels, from amateur to professional.

The program also addresses European Union's internal education, training, youth and sports integration, construction, and social issues. Improvement in teaching and the organization of dialogue, research, and the quality of the participation of the students from the Union are definitely the 'Jean Monnet' activities (Nogueiro, Saraiva, Jorge & Chaleta, 2022).

The most recent changes in the Erasmus+ 2021-2027 program aim to enhance participation of small organizations, EU's periphery, disabled, migrants, and remote regions.

Moldova is very active in the EU's educational initiatives, and this program holds great value for them (Romanova, 2023). Through Erasmus+, students from our country are able to travel to European universities.

This initiative allows them to improve their English and gain an international academic and cultural experience. Being involved in this initiative has a positive impact on the quality of education and professional improvement, and it creates job opportunities for the country's youth.

This **research** aims to examine students' perspectives on participating in Erasmus+ and their anticipated improvements in English language skills and academic performance.

Research **objectives** are:

1. To study the level of knowledges of students about the Erasmus+ program.
2. To determine the interest of students in participating in international educational programs.
3. To evaluate the opinion of students about the influence of the Erasmus+ program on the development of English.
4. To analyze students' perception of the impact of international mobility on academic performance.
5. To identify the main motivations for students' participation in the Erasmus+ program.

The **object of research** is the students of higher education institutions in the Republic of Moldova. The **subject** of study is the students' attitude towards participating in the Erasmus+ program, and their view of the program's impact on English language proficiency and academic performance. The study used the **method** of questionnaire (survey) of students. During the survey, data were collected on the awareness of students, their interest and expectations from participation in this educational program. Has been also used methods of analysis and overview to formulate conclusions based on the results obtained.

RESEARCH ANALYSIS

The main part of the work is devoted to the analysis of a survey conducted among students of the Academy of Economic Studies of Moldova. The research is empirical in nature. The questions included in the survey were directly related to the objectives of the study.

As previously mentioned, the participants were students of a higher education institution who could potentially take part in the Erasmus+ program. The total number of respondents was 77. The survey consisted of ten closed-ended questions, which allowed for more generalized and reliable conclusions.

The questions were designed to determine the level of students' awareness of the international mobility program, its impact on English language proficiency, and the challenges faced by the respondents. After conducting the survey, all responses were systematized and analyzed. Based on the data obtained, the results are presented below.

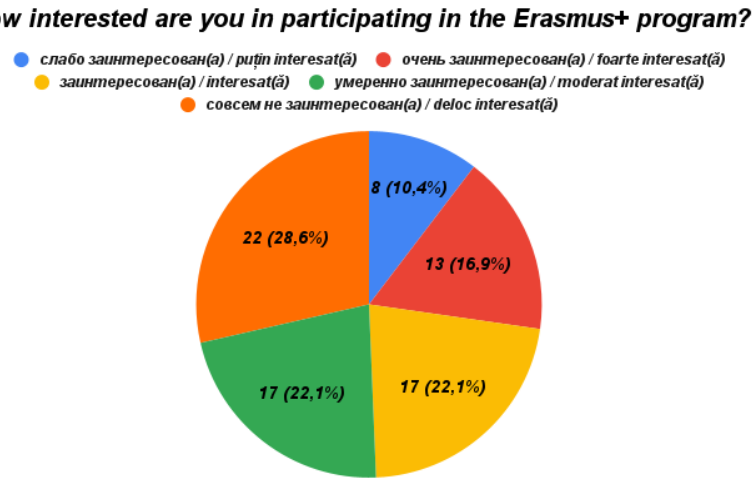


Figure 1: Determining respondents' level of interest in participating in the Erasmus+ program.

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on the conducted survey.

Based on the data in the chart, it can be concluded that the largest number of respondents, 28.6% (22 people), are not at all interested in participating in the program. A significant number of students show moderate and average interest in participating, with 17 people in each category. 16.9% (13 people) are very interested, indicating that there are individuals who are willing to participate in academic mobility. The smallest numbers of respondents, 8 people, are slightly interested.

Based on the above, it appears that there is a neutral level of interest among those considering participation in the program. The proportion of those who are at least somewhat interested exceeds the proportion of those who are not interested, but there is no significant dominance. Additionally, there is a significant group of those who are not interested. This indicates that there is potential for engagement through additional information and support.

The next block is dedicated to students' expectations of participating in the Erasmus+ program.

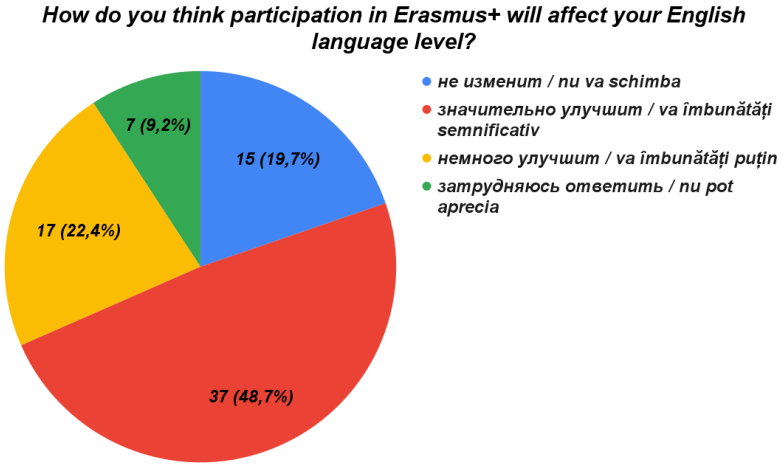


Figure 2: Respondents' expectations from participation in the Erasmus+ program.
Source: Elaborated by the authors based on the conducted survey.

Survey data among students revealed the following results: 48.7% of those surveyed believe that participation in the Erasmus+ program will significantly improve their English language proficiency. The next result is that 22.4% of respondents believe the language level will improve, but insignificantly. This can also be considered a positive result of the project's influence. In total, it can be said that more than 70% of students count on improving their English language knowledge. But there are students (19.7% of participants) who believe that this program will not affect their existing language level because they are confident in their knowledge. A part of the respondents (9.2%) could not answer this question because they are not interested in this program. This may indicate an insufficient level of awareness about the advantages of Erasmus+.

Summarizing the results, it can be concluded that students as a whole are oriented toward obtaining high results in the development of the English language.

However, it should be understood that there are problems that make participation in the international program difficult.

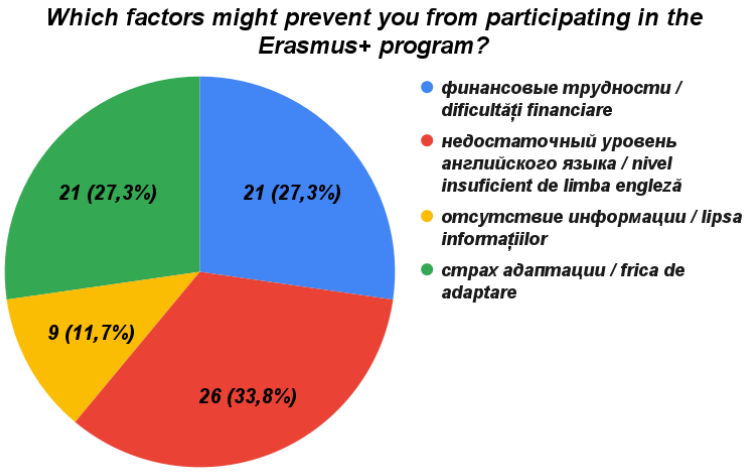


Figure 3: Identification of potential barriers preventing participation in the Erasmus+ program.

Source: Elaborated by the authors based on the conducted survey.

Based on the diagram data, more than 33.8% of students believe that the main obstacle to participation is an insufficient level of English language proficiency, as the level of language knowledge is the main point for participation in the program. Among the barriers, second place is occupied by financial difficulties. 27.3% of respondents believe that additional financial expenses may arise that the program does not cover. On par with financial difficulties are the psychological and cultural barriers of the program participants. Students note that they fear adaptation in a new place. Lack of information, according to the results, is not a problem, which indicates that students are well-informed about the ongoing program.

Based on all of the above, we can conclude that the main barriers are an insufficient level of English language knowledge, the fear of a lack of finances, and adaptation in a new place.

Based on the analysis conducted, a general conclusion can be formulated. Thus, students demonstrate a moderate level of interest in participating in the Erasmus+ program. Most of them believe that participation will allow them to improve their level of English language proficiency. However, it is also observed that respondents are not sufficiently motivated to participate in the program due to a lack of interest. In addition, the results show the existence of a number of factors that limit the number of students able to participate in the program. Among them:

- Insufficient level of English language proficiency;
- Financial difficulties;
- Difficulties in adapting to a new environment.

Thus, despite the presence of a considerable number of advantages of participating in the program, it is necessary to develop recommendations to address these issues.

In order to strengthen the positive impact of participation in the Erasmus+ program on English language proficiency and the academic performance of participants, we can propose the following measures:

1. Language preparation for students participating in the Erasmus+ program. This may include conducting additional workshops, training sessions, and preparing those who have applied for participation.

2. Increase the encouragement of active English language use in students' academic and everyday activities. This can be achieved through advisory support and coordination of the learning process.

3. Prepare students for intercultural and educational adaptation to reduce stress and increase learning efficiency. This will directly lead to improved academic results, as students will be prepared for intercultural differences and will feel confident in their English language skills.

CONCLUSION

In our view, the Erasmus+ program represents an effective tool for developing language skills and enhancing the professional training of students. Even at the level of expectations, it is evident that students associate participation in the program with real educational advantages.

However, we believe that to achieve the maximum effect, it is important not only to inform students about the program but also to create conditions under which they can fully realize its opportunities. In this case, Erasmus+ can become not just an educational experience, but a significant factor in professional growth.

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Coordonator ştiinţific: ROMANOVA Anastasia , dr., conf.univ.
Academia de Studii Economice din Moldova
Republica Moldova, Chișinău, str. Bănulescu – Bodoni 61
romanova.anastasia@ase.md