

## COMMUNICATION BARRIERS ENCOUNTERED BY ERASMUS STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ORADEA: CHALLENGES AND ADAPTATION STRATEGIES

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**Abstract:** *This study explores the communication challenges faced by Erasmus students during their short-term learning experience at the University of Oradea in the 2023-2024 academic year. By examining the impact of language barriers on academic performance and social adaptation, the research highlights the difficulties encountered by 25 Erasmus students from diverse cultural backgrounds, including Turkey, Portugal, Spain, and France. Communication issues emerge as a critical factor influencing students' ability to integrate both academically and socially. The paper provides an overview of the Erasmus Program, emphasizing its objectives and the opportunities it offers for academic and personal growth. It then explores specific challenges, including cultural differences, homesickness, variations in academic systems, healthcare access, transportation difficulties, financial constraints, bureaucratic hurdles, and dietary restrictions. Among these, language barriers stand out as a pervasive issue, affecting students' interactions with faculty, colleagues, and the local community. The study further investigates the role of language proficiency in facilitating or hindering students' academic success and overall well-being. Institutional support, such as language courses and integration programs, is discussed as a crucial element in mitigating communication difficulties. The methodology involves data collection through questionnaires and interviews, offering valuable insights into students' experiences and perceptions. The findings indicate that communication barriers significantly impact Erasmus students' academic engagement, social integration, and overall satisfaction with their study-abroad experience. The results emphasize the necessity for targeted interventions, such as enhanced language training and structured support mechanisms, to ensure a more inclusive and rewarding exchange experience. The study concludes with recommendations for improving language proficiency initiatives, fostering cross-cultural communication, and strengthening institutional support to enhance students' overall Erasmus journey. Ultimately, while recognizing the Erasmus Program's transformative potential in fostering international mobility and cultural exchange, the research underscores the need to address communication challenges effectively to maximize students' academic success and personal growth.*

**Keywords:** *communication barriers, language proficiency, academic integration, Erasmus Program.*

**JEL Classification:** Z13, Y8

## 1. Introduction

This study explores the impact of foreign language proficiency on the academic performance and social integration of Erasmus students who have chosen to study at the University of Oradea for one or two semesters. The research is based on an analysis of questionnaire responses from 25 Erasmus students from diverse cultural backgrounds, including Turkey, Portugal, Spain, and France. Our focus on communication barriers stems from the observation that many Erasmus students encounter difficulties in effectively using English, which serves as the primary medium of instruction and interaction in academic and social settings. These language challenges can significantly influence their ability to engage with coursework, participate in discussions, and form meaningful connections with peers and faculty members.

One major concern is that some lecturers may struggle to deliver their courses in English fluently, potentially limiting Erasmus students' ability to fully grasp academic content. This issue highlights the broader challenge of language preparedness, not only for students but also for host institutions striving to create an inclusive and effective learning environment. Beyond academic concerns, language barriers can also affect students' daily interactions, making it more difficult for them to navigate administrative processes, seek medical assistance, or engage in social and cultural activities.

To provide a comprehensive understanding of these challenges and opportunities, the paper begins with an overview of the Erasmus program, emphasizing its objectives and the potential benefits of international mobility for students. Following this, we present insights gathered from Erasmus students, detailing the communication barriers they encountered and the strategies they employed to overcome them. Since language proficiency is a key factor in successful adaptation, we also discuss the language competency standards that Erasmus students are expected to meet when studying abroad.

Additionally, we examine the institutional support available for students facing language difficulties, including language courses, tutoring programs, and integration initiatives. The study also considers broader cultural and systemic factors that may influence communication, such as differences in teaching styles, academic expectations, and intercultural communication norms.

Finally, the study details the methodology used to analyze the questionnaire responses, presents the key findings, and draws conclusions based on the collected data. By addressing the impact of communication barriers on Erasmus students' experiences, this research aims to contribute to a better understanding of the linguistic and cultural challenges in international education. Furthermore, it seeks to provide recommendations for improving institutional support mechanisms, ensuring

that Erasmus students can maximize both their academic success and personal growth during their mobility experience.

## **2. Data about the Erasmus Program.**

### **2.1. General data about the Erasmus Program.**

The Erasmus Program provides students and academic staff with the opportunity to study and develop both personally and academically within an international university setting. As a key initiative within the European Union's education policies, the program aims to foster acceptance of cultural diversity, promote democratic values, and enhance intercultural awareness. These objectives align with broader European strategies that emphasize integration, economic development, and social cohesion. Additionally, the Erasmus Program is designed to support lifelong learning and mobility, stimulate creativity, and improve the overall quality of education across Europe (Council of the European Union, 2009). By equipping individuals with valuable knowledge and skills, it also facilitates a smoother transition into the labor market, enhancing career prospects for participants (Teichler, 2019).

### **2.2. Key Statistics on the Erasmus Program**

Since its inception in 1987, the Erasmus Program has gained significant popularity, with a growing number of students and educators choosing to participate for the academic, professional, and personal benefits it offers (Papatsiba, 2005). The Erasmus+ Program has experienced significant growth and has had a substantial impact on education, mobility, and cross-cultural collaboration in Europe and beyond.

Since its inception, over 10 million people, including students, educators, and staff, have taken part in the Erasmus+ program (European Commission, 2024a). Each year, hundreds of thousands of individuals benefit from academic exchanges, professional training, and volunteering opportunities abroad. In 2023 alone, more than 900,000 participants engaged in various mobility activities such as studying, training, and volunteering abroad (European Commission, 2024a).

Between 2014 and 2024, the program contracted more than 230,000 projects, collaborating with nearly 170,000 organizations, including universities, vocational schools, NGOs, and research institutions (European Commission, 2024b). These partnerships have been instrumental in fostering international cooperation and innovation in education.

The Erasmus+ program has been allocated a budget of €26.2 billion for the period 2021-2027, which is nearly double the amount of the previous funding cycle (European Commission, 2024c). This increased financial support reflects the European Union's commitment to expanding educational mobility and inclusion. While originally focused on European countries, Erasmus+ now supports mobility and cooperation with over 190 countries worldwide, allowing for greater international engagement and collaboration beyond Europe (European Commission, 2024d).

Approximately 70% of Erasmus+ participants are higher education students. Erasmus mobility has been shown to significantly enhance employability, with 80%

of Erasmus alumni securing jobs within three months of graduation (European Commission, 2024e).

Erasmus+ is one of the most effective programs for promoting multilingualism. Around 50% of students improve their language skills significantly during their mobility period, and 90% report greater cultural awareness and adaptability after their experience abroad (European Commission, 2024f).

The program has placed a stronger emphasis on inclusion, with targeted funding and initiatives for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, ensuring that Erasmus+ remains accessible to a diverse range of participants (European Commission, 2024g).

These statistics demonstrate the far-reaching impact of the Erasmus+ program on students, educators, and institutions, as well as its role in fostering international collaboration and cultural exchange.

### **2.3. Communication barriers and opportunities**

Research has shown that Erasmus students tend to develop stronger intercultural competencies, improved language skills, and increased employability compared to their non-mobile peers (Mitchell, 2015). However, while the program presents numerous opportunities, it also comes with challenges—particularly in the realm of communication. Language barriers remain a common issue that can affect students' ability to integrate into their new academic and social environments, ultimately influencing their overall experience (Sweeney, 2013). Some studies highlight that even students with prior language preparation may struggle with academic terminology, local dialects, or different teaching methodologies (Coleman, 2006).

At the same time, overcoming these challenges provides students with a unique opportunity to develop linguistic skills, adaptability, and intercultural competencies, which are increasingly valuable in today's globalized world. Universities have implemented various support mechanisms, such as preparatory language courses, tutoring programs, and cultural orientation sessions, to help Erasmus students navigate these barriers (Smit & Dafouz, 2012). However, the effectiveness of these measures varies depending on institutional resources, student engagement, and individual linguistic backgrounds.

Along with the opportunities it provides, the experience of studying in a foreign country brings about challenges as well. These include the necessity to adjust to new social and cultural norms, surpass linguistic obstacles, manage with dietary restrictions, transportation problems, accessibility to healthcare services, money management, and, most importantly, the need to get over feelings of isolation and loneliness.

According to a study developed by the Directorate-General for Internal Policies of the European Parliament, additional factors that could potentially discourage candidates from participating in the Erasmus program include: the grant's inability to cover necessary costs for students, coupled with a lack of information about funding and co-funding opportunities (Improving the Participation to the Erasmus Programme, 2010:11, 2010:18); inadequate information about study/credit recognition; a lack of awareness about the program and inadequate information in relation to it; uncertainty regarding the compatibility of higher education systems

(Improving...2010:16); in addition, students who are more interested in academic experience than in cross-cultural exchange appear to find the Erasmus program less appealing. This idea is supported by more skeptical points of view, according to which short-term experiences do not generate long-lasting changes in individuals (Forsey, Broomhall & Davis 2012).

This section of the paper explores both the challenges and opportunities that arise in the context of the Erasmus Program, with a particular focus on the role of communication. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing effective support systems that enhance students' ability to fully benefit from their mobility experience.

#### **2.4. The experience of Erasmus students in Oradea**

Before distributing the questionnaire to the chosen group of Erasmus students, we collected information about their experiences through in-person interviews and written responses to the following question:

How can you describe your time as an Erasmus student at the University of Oradea and in Romania?

A number of 25 students accepted to speak about their experience in Oradea. We can infer from the data collected that the main obstacles faced by Erasmus students are:

##### **a. Cultural barriers**

Cultural differences present a serious obstacle for Erasmus students, despite the fact that differences tend to become less noticeable in today's globalized world. Therefore, even though the Erasmus students who agreed to share their experiences with us acknowledge that Romania's culture, language, and customs differ greatly from those of their home countries, they also found common elements. In such a context, the solution proposed by most students interviewed is that an open attitude of Erasmus students with regards to Romania's culture, traditions and habits might be very helpful for their integration and academic success. Additionally, it was suggested that learning as much as possible about Romanian traditions and culture, prior to traveling to Oradea, participating in local festivals and events, and joining international student organizations while residing in Oradea could facilitate an easier adaptation to the host country and its academic environment. Such openness towards other cultures is actually one of the main objectives of the Erasmus Program.

##### **b. Yearning for home**

A common problem for many Erasmus students is their difficulty to manage alienation from their familiar environment. Being away from home, encountering different people, with other habits and traditions, may contribute to feelings of loneliness and isolation. This is an understandable phenomenon, especially in the case of students whose Erasmus stage is their first longer separation from home. As possibilities to overcome this issue, using new technology to communicate constantly with the family, building friendship with Romanian or other Erasmus students, living an active social life were strategies suggested by the Erasmus students, which may contribute to an easier transition to a new environment and the success of their Erasmus experience.

**c. Differences between academic systems**

One of the foremost purposes of the Erasmus program is precisely to make students familiar with other educational environments and academic systems, thus the differences may be regarded as possibilities to understand and become aware of diverse approaches to learning. In general, coordinators of Erasmus programs make sure that the Erasmus students may benefit from academic support services (tutorship, counseling, study groups.)

**d. Differences among healthcare systems**

The Erasmus students that agreed to speak about their experience at the University of Oradea suggested that Romanian healthcare services are less developed and more expensive than in their home countries and they felt anxiety as regards the possibility of needing medical attention during their stay. For this reason, they suggested the possibility of acquiring a more comprehensive healthcare insurances as a solution to overcome anxiety relating to healthcare services. Additionally, carrying a supply of necessary medication can assist students in taking care of minor medical conditions. Being able to speak English or some Romanian was also mentioned as a form of support in solving health-related issues.

**e. Transport-related issues**

Mobility of Erasmus students may be limited if public transportation is not available at all hours of the day or is not very frequent. However, the students we interviewed suggested they solved easily transport-related issues by using ride-sharing services, such as Uber and Bolt. As emphasized by the Erasmus students themselves, this is another barrier that can be more easily overcome if foreign students are able to speak English and/or Romanian.

**f. Financial challenges**

Planning a budget is one of the chief concerns of Erasmus students who spent one or two semesters in Oradea. Since the program does not cover all costs, allocating a budget for both expected and unexpected expenses is of crucial importance even before arriving in the host country. In addition, as Romania still uses its specific currency (lei), which is not widely available outside this country, using online banking services or opening a local bank account were mentioned as possibilities for anticipating or overcoming financial-related issues.

**g. Bureaucratic challenges**

Keeping all necessary documents in good order and learning some basic vocabulary in Romania may help facilitate communication with the administration in Oradea. In addition, international student office at the host university can provide support with administrative issues.

**h. Diet-related challenges**

Some cultures also impose specific dietary restrictions. Some students may have food allergies or special food-related needs. In such a context, Erasmus students may find it difficult to buy or order food in the host country, especially if communication in English and/or Romanian is a problem. As mentioned by the students we interviewed, labels are not always written in both English and Romanian, in local markets seller often speak only Romanian and/or Hungarian (in the case of Oradea), thus making it difficult to ask about ingredients used in dishes. Again, learning some food-related vocabulary and phrases was suggested as a helpful solution, along with using translation apps or asking for help. In addition,

choosing to stay in accommodation with kitchen facilities may allow students to prepare their own meals.

Based on the answers received from students, we can conclude that the Erasmus students encounter different types of barriers and challenges in the host country. In essence, all these are related to their capacity to communicate efficiently. Thus, in the next section we shall look at how the good command of English and may prove very helpful. Of course, as mentioned above, acquiring at least a basic conversational level in Romanian could help students in their interactions within the academic environments, the public transportation system, health care services, government agencies, and local authorities. It could also help with communication in local markets.

However, while English proficiency may suffice in many academic and social settings, there are additional benefits to acquiring at least a basic conversational level in Romanian, the host country's official language. Although most Erasmus students can manage day-to-day life in Oradea using English, knowing some Romanian can dramatically improve their interactions in situations where English may not be widely spoken or understood. For instance, when dealing with public transportation, healthcare services, or government agencies, students may encounter situations where communication in English is limited, which can create frustration or confusion. A basic knowledge of Romanian would help students navigate these essential services more smoothly, making their time in Oradea more enjoyable and less stressful.

In summary, while a strong command of English undoubtedly facilitates Erasmus students' academic success and integration into international environments, learning at least some Romanian can significantly enrich their overall experience. It enables them to engage more fully in the local community, access essential services, and navigate their daily lives with greater ease, ultimately contributing to a more positive and transformative Erasmus experience.

## **2.5. Linguistic challenges and opportunities for Erasmus students**

Language proficiency plays a crucial role in the academic and social integration of Erasmus students in a foreign country. It is often considered both a barrier and an enabler, as language proficiency can significantly impact students' academic success and their ability to integrate socially. At the University of Oradea, like in many other universities participating in the Erasmus program, English is the primary language of communication for international students.

The Erasmus+ program offers several mechanisms to assist students in overcoming language barriers, one of the most important being the **Online Language Support (OLS)** system. OLS is a free, online service provided by the European Commission to help Erasmus students improve their language skills before and during their mobility experience. The OLS system offers a language assessment before departure, which evaluates a student's language proficiency in the language they will use for study or work. Based on the results, students can access various language courses designed to improve their proficiency in the selected language.

One of the key advantages of the OLS system is that it allows students to improve their language skills at their own pace and from any location, making it

accessible and flexible. Students can engage in interactive learning modules and practice their language skills through various exercises. While the OLS platform primarily focuses on helping students improve their proficiency in English, it also provides support for other languages commonly spoken within the Erasmus+ network.

However, it is important to note that the results of the OLS language assessment do not limit students' participation in the Erasmus+ program. Even if a student's language proficiency level is low, they are still allowed to participate in the exchange program, which reflects the program's inclusive nature. Despite the support provided by OLS, many Erasmus students report struggling with language barriers, particularly when their academic programs are not taught in English or when they lack sufficient proficiency in the host country's language.

At the University of Oradea, the evaluation of Erasmus students' language proficiency is typically conducted by the partner institution before the mobility period. For students attending programs that are not taught in English, the university applies a tutoring system. This system provides additional support, where students receive assistance in English for their courses and laboratories, and assessments are completed in English, helping to bridge the gap created by language barriers. However, challenges persist, especially when some professors are not able or willing to conduct lectures in English, which forces Erasmus students to rely on self-study and project-based learning. This situation often leads to a less immersive academic experience for these students.

While the OLS language system is a valuable resource for Erasmus students, the language challenges faced by students at the University of Oradea and similar institutions highlight the need for continuous support in language learning. The presence of a tutoring system and flexible learning tools like OLS can help mitigate these challenges, but addressing issues like faculty language readiness and increasing language support across disciplines remain critical to enhancing the Erasmus experience for all participants.

### **3. Methodology**

As methodological approach we sought to explore how language proficiency, particularly in English, influences the academic and social integration of Erasmus students at the University of Oradea. To achieve this, we utilized a mixed-methods approach, relying primarily on quantitative data collected through a questionnaire while also considering qualitative insights based on personal interactions and observations over the past five years.

In order to better understand the experiences of Erasmus students at the University of Oradea and suggest possible solutions to overcoming language barriers, we conducted a study involving 25 Erasmus students from the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Information Technology, and the Faculty of Construction, Cadastre, and Architecture. The goal was to explore how English language proficiency impacts their academic performance and social integration during their stay.



To collect data, we designed a questionnaire consisting of 12 multiple-choice questions, aimed at encouraging students to express their opinions on the role of language skills in their academic and social lives. The questionnaire was administered via Google Forms at the end of the students' first or second semester in Oradea, and participation was voluntary.

In developing the questionnaire, we relied mainly on our interactions, throughout the last five years, with the Erasmus students studying in Oradea and the observation of their English-language proficiency. We started from the assumption that more accurate knowledge of the language chosen for communication might facilitate the academic success of Erasmus students. The questionnaire items were reviewed and checked by the co-authors of this study, who also teach English for Specific Purposes to Erasmus students.

Once the responses were collected, we analyzed the data, compared the results, and aligned them with our observations of students' participation in class activities and overall academic performance. This comparative analysis helped us gain insights into the students' perspectives on language barriers and their strategies for overcoming them.

It is also important to note that, while the questionnaire was designed to focus on language proficiency and its role in academic and social integration, it is possible that other factors, such as cultural differences, personal attitudes, and institutional support mechanisms, also influenced the students' experiences. These factors were not directly assessed in the survey, which is a limitation of the study. Future research could expand this study by including a wider range of questions that address these variables more explicitly, as well as by gathering data from a more diverse sample of students across different faculties and universities.

The methodology, however, offers a useful framework for understanding the challenges that Erasmus students face and suggests that language proficiency is a key factor in determining academic and social success. By addressing the linguistic barriers faced by students, institutions can enhance the overall Erasmus experience, ensuring that students fully benefit from the opportunities the program provides.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1. Discussions**

The results from the questionnaire reveal several key insights into the experience of Erasmus students at the University of Oradea, particularly regarding the role of language proficiency in their academic and social integration. The first question aimed to evaluate the overall ease or difficulty students faced when integrating into the academic environment at Oradea University. A significant 65.2% of respondents reported that adaptation was difficult, suggesting that a substantial number of Erasmus students struggle with the transition into a new academic setting. This could be related to factors such as unfamiliarity with the academic system, cultural differences, or difficulties in communication. Only 30.4% of the students found it easy to adapt, while a small portion (4.3%) did not provide a clear answer. These figures underscore the importance of addressing the barriers

students face in adapting to a foreign academic environment.

The second question sought to determine whether English was the primary language of communication for both academic and social activities. The results show that 65.2% of respondents selected English as their primary communication language, while 34.8% reported relying solely on English for their interactions. This confirms the central role of English in the Erasmus students' experience, both in their academic studies and social interactions. However, it also suggests that a small group may face additional challenges in engaging with their peers and professors if their English proficiency is not sufficient.

The third question focused on the impact of language proficiency on academic performance. The findings indicate that language barriers have a significant effect on the academic success of Erasmus students. A notable 13% of respondents acknowledged that their limited language skills had a major negative impact on their studies, while over half (52.2%) reported experiencing minor integration challenges due to their language abilities. Interestingly, 34.8% did not associate language with any barriers to academic adaptation, indicating that some students may be more adept at overcoming language difficulties.

When asked about their attendance in lectures, more than half of the students actively participated in lectures and practical activities. However, 30.4% did not attend classes regularly, and 4.3% did not provide an explanation for their lack of participation. The correlation between language proficiency and attendance is apparent, as the responses suggest that students who struggled with English proficiency were less likely to attend classes. Additionally, some students did not attend because of the perceived inability or reluctance of lecturers to conduct courses in English, with 45.5% of respondents indicating that this was a factor in their decision not to participate. This highlights the importance of having both students and lecturers proficient in English for effective learning experiences. The findings from the seventh question show that language proficiency also affects students' social integration. While some Erasmus students were able to adapt socially, 34.8% reported that their English skills hindered their ability to integrate into the social fabric of the university. This aligns with the earlier findings regarding academic integration, further emphasizing that communication difficulties extend beyond the classroom and impact students' overall Erasmus experience. As expected, the vast majority of students (100%) reported taking steps to improve their language skills. This reflects the students' awareness of the importance of language proficiency in overcoming barriers. Many Erasmus students took advantage of resources such as language support programs offered by the University of Oradea, confirming that the institution's role in providing linguistic assistance is crucial. The data from question nine show that 64% of students benefited from such programs, while 32% did not, highlighting the need for more widespread participation in these support initiatives.

Regarding the improvement in their foreign language skills, 76% of the respondents felt that their language proficiency had improved during their time at the university, while 24% felt that the impact was minimal. This suggests that while the Erasmus experience is beneficial for language development, not all students perceive the same level of progress. However, when asked about the overall impact of the Erasmus program on their future careers, 100% of the respondents reported

a positive outlook, indicating that the program's benefits extend beyond language acquisition, contributing to personal and professional growth. Finally, when students were asked to evaluate the Erasmus experience as a whole, 96% expressed that it was a worthwhile and transformative experience. This overwhelming positive response underscores the value of the Erasmus program despite the challenges faced, particularly related to language barriers.

While language barriers pose significant challenges to Erasmus students at the University of Oradea, these challenges are not insurmountable. The study highlights the importance of English proficiency for academic success and social integration, and it also underscores the role of the host institution in supporting language development. Students' proactive efforts to overcome language barriers, combined with the university's language support programs, contribute to an overall positive Erasmus experience, which students perceive as both academically enriching and personally transformative.

#### **4.2. Interpretation of results**

The findings from the questionnaire suggest that participating in the Erasmus program is an enriching and transformative experience for most students, offering opportunities to broaden their perspectives, gain insight into different cultures and academic systems, and develop personal skills. For many students, it serves as an avenue for improving their communication abilities in a foreign language, which is one of the primary goals of the Erasmus program. However, the data also highlights some challenges that need to be addressed, particularly regarding language proficiency. These challenges were identified as potential barriers to the students' academic success and social integration.

A significant portion of students reported difficulties in academic integration, which were linked to their limited proficiency in the English language. This was compounded by the fact that some lecturers were not fully able or willing to teach in English, further hindering the academic experience. This suggests that while language is the main means of communication in the Erasmus program, both students and faculty may need additional support to ensure effective interaction in an academic environment. Language barriers thus emerged as a central challenge in achieving the academic and social objectives of the Erasmus experience.

#### **4.3. Suggestions for Improvement**

One of the key areas for improvement is the selection process for Erasmus students. Ensuring that candidates have a certain level of proficiency in the language they will be using (most commonly English) could significantly improve their chances of academic success and social integration. A pre-departure language assessment or certification (e.g., CAMBRIDGE, TOEFL, IELTS, or a similar assessment) could be implemented to ensure that students have the necessary language skills to succeed in their studies and in social interactions. This would minimize the challenges faced by students with limited language abilities and increase the likelihood of a successful experience.

### **Improved language support programs**

While the University of Oradea provides some language support programs, more robust and comprehensive language support could be beneficial. These could include:

- Pre-departure language preparation: Students should be encouraged or required to take language courses or engage in language immersion programs before their departure, ensuring they have a strong foundation in the language of their host country.
- Enhanced Ongoing Language Support: The university could expand its Online Language Support (OLS) program or offer additional language workshops, conversation clubs, and peer mentoring to help students continuously improve their language skills while they are in Oradea. This support should not be limited to English but could also include basic Romanian language training to facilitate better communication with locals in non-academic settings.
- Language tutoring: Personalized tutoring sessions for Erasmus students could also be offered to improve their English proficiency, focusing on both academic and conversational aspects of the language.

### **Development of bilingual course materials**

To make Erasmus mobility more inclusive, institutions should encourage lecturers to create course-related materials that are accessible both in English and in the local language (e.g., Romanian for students in Oradea). This dual-language approach can help Erasmus students better understand the content, reduce language barriers, and improve their overall academic performance. It also ensures that students who are not yet proficient in the local language but are comfortable with English will have equal access to educational resources. Lecturers should also be encouraged to integrate flexible teaching methods that account for varying levels of language proficiency.

### **Faculty training and support for multilingual classrooms**

Some Erasmus students reported difficulties in fully engaging with lectures due to the communication barriers caused by professors' limited proficiency in English. Faculty members who teach Erasmus students should be provided with professional development opportunities focused on improving their ability to deliver courses in English. Training programs could include language enhancement workshops and cultural sensitivity training to help professors better integrate Erasmus students into their classes. Additionally, professors could be encouraged to use more accessible language in their lectures and provide supplemental materials (such as written summaries, glossaries, or lecture slides) to support students' comprehension.

### **Encouraging active participation and integration**

To further improve the integration process, the university could develop activities designed to facilitate social interactions and cultural exchange. Social events, study groups, and language exchange programs would provide students with opportunities to practice their language skills in informal settings and build friendships with local and international peers. Erasmus students should also be encouraged to engage in campus life outside of the academic context, such as joining student organizations or participating in volunteer opportunities, which can further enhance their integration into the local community.

### **Cultural sensitivity and awareness training for lecturers**

Training programs for lecturers could also be implemented to help them understand the specific needs of Erasmus students, especially regarding language proficiency and cultural differences. This could include workshops on how to effectively communicate with non-native speakers, adapt teaching methods for an international audience, and create an inclusive learning environment that supports all students regardless of their linguistic background.

### **Promoting buddy mentorship programs**

Establishing peer mentorship programs where local students or more experienced Erasmus students can assist newcomers with language barriers, cultural adaptation, and academic integration could foster a stronger support system. These buddy mentors can guide new students in navigating the academic environment, social activities, and everyday life in Oradea, helping them feel more comfortable and supported.

### **Improving orientation programs**

Orientation programs for incoming Erasmus students should place a stronger emphasis on language skills and their role in both academic and social integration. Alongside practical information about the city and the university, students could receive guidance on how to improve their language skills and how to use the available resources effectively. These programs could also emphasize the importance of engaging with the local culture and language, encouraging students to learn basic Romanian phrases for daily interactions outside the academic setting.

### **Enhancing collaboration between universities**

It would be beneficial for the University of Oradea to collaborate with other institutions participating in the Erasmus program to share best practices for language support and integration. This could involve joint workshops, webinars, or collaborative research on how to overcome language barriers in the Erasmus context. Such partnerships could help create a more cohesive and efficient language support network across participating universities.

The Erasmus program offers tremendous opportunities for academic, personal, and professional development. However, as the results of this study suggest, language barriers continue to pose challenges for students, potentially limiting their ability to fully benefit from the experience. By implementing a combination of more rigorous language proficiency requirements, expanded language support services, faculty training, and enhanced integration programs, the University of Oradea and similar institutions can help Erasmus students overcome these barriers and make the most of their time abroad. Ultimately, these improvements will help Erasmus students better integrate into their academic and social environments, leading to a more successful and enriching experience.

## **5. Conclusion**

This paper aimed to explore the role of foreign language skills upon the social integration and academic success of Erasmus students studying at the University of Oradea. The data was obtained based on the answers given by 25 Erasmus students to a questionnaire that included 12 items.

After analyzing the results, the following conclusions can be drawn.

The Erasmus mobility is definitely a source of positive transformation, helping students develop personally and academically while encountering a new educational context and living in a different social and cultural environment. Though short-term, it can accelerate development on many aspects of one's life and personality. The findings indicated that all Erasmus students interviewed perceived their experience at the University of Oradea as a valuable one, contributing to their personal development, improvement of capacity to work in a multicultural context, acceptance of other cultures, traditions and values. Though short-term, this experience can also contribute to developing one's communication abilities, especially when using a foreign language. In terms of their improvement of English language skills, most students interviewed for this study agreed to have benefited from their staying and studying in Oradea.

On the other hand, this study has revealed that, academically speaking, limited knowledge of the chosen foreign language can have a detrimental effect on students' understanding of the material presented in class, which can definitely have a strong impact both on their grades and their sense of accomplishment. In this respect, our findings align both with our observation at class and with the results of other studies on foreign language proficiency of Erasmus students (see Kolosheva et al, 2015, Zhang and Brunton, 2007).

However, it must be acknowledged that this present study has limitations. First future research on the topic might consider collecting data from more participants. In addition, formulating the questionnaire so as to encourage students to give explanations for their answers would definitely be more relevant for understanding the barriers they encountered while trying to adapt to the educational system of Oradea University.

Another interesting perspective for gaining a deeper insight into what the Erasmus mobility actually means in a person's life would be to continue collaboration with former Erasmus students and understand the transformative effects of their Erasmus experience for their lives, based on retrospective analysis and accounts.

Considering the value of this study for the context of understanding and improving the Erasmus students' experience, we believe that reference to the context in Romania, a country rarely discussed in the research literature, is the one that represents a factor of originality.

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