



# **A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF ERASMUS EXPERIENCES**

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- **Research topic:** The present study is the content analysis of 502 Erasmus students' experiences published in the website [www.20erasmus.eu](http://www.20erasmus.eu).
- **The aim of the study:** This study aims to identify the most frequently mentioned concepts in response to the Erasmus experience-related questions "Did you grow-up? Was this experience useful for your life and for your career? Did you feel like home away from home? Did Erasmus change your life? Do you miss that time?" published in the website [www.20erasmus.eu](http://www.20erasmus.eu), the context (positive/negative) and the attitudes towards Erasmus program via content analysis. In addition to this, identifying whether the Erasmus program influences individual or academic development and the extent to which the Erasmus Student Exchange Program has reached its aims on the basis of collected data are among the aims of this program.
- **Research Methodology:** The content analysis of 502 Erasmus experiences shared in the website [www.20erasmus.eu](http://www.20erasmus.eu) was conducted via Simple Concordance 4.0.7. program. Thus, the total word number and word frequency could be presented in tables.

# Content analysis of Erasmus Experience titles



**Table 2: The frequency distribution of the words used in Erasmus experience titles**

Word	Frequency	%
Discover	137	31.1
Life	70	15.9
Love	58	13.1
Dream	44	9.9
Touch	38	8.6
Erasmus	29	6.6
World	25	5.7
Europe	17	3.9
Experience	13	2.9
Friend	10	2.3
Sum	441	100

Students used the concept “discover” most frequently in the experience title.

The fact that the symbol (!) was used 232 times in the titles is an indication of the excitement with which students talk about their experiences.



- It was also observed that the students used the word “discover” most frequently in relation to “themselves” and “life”.
- **The students emphasized the following in their discoveries related to themselves:**
  - Myself
  - My limits
  - A new side of me
  - Myself differently
  - I DISCOVERED → A new me
  - My identity
  - My reality
  - I discovered myself being
  - Happy
  - Who I really am
  - Another me



- **The students emphasized the following in their discoveries related to life**

- A new way of life
- So much about life
- What life is
- How good life can
- lovely lifestyle
- I DISCOVERED → A new life
- a new way of life
- The meaning of life
- Easy life
- How much life can
- Different ways of life
- Erasmus life



- **Other subjects and areas discovered by students are as follows:**
- Multiculturality, international, Europe, a wonderful place, true emotions, Home away from home, the World, new world, others, paradise, similarities, dreams, magic of cultures, sing Language, universe, diversity, rainbow world joy, a great friendship, many new people, so many things, love, hundreds of different worlds, the heaven, diversity, happiness, European essence, pure and unlimited freedom, what is the mix of nations, each other, other world.
- At this point, it could be argued that students' range of exploration is highly diverse.



- **An analysis of the concept “life” reveals the following:**
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- The second most frequently used concept in the experience title is “life”. The word “life” is mostly used together with “discovery”, which was also mentioned above. Apart from this, an analysis of the meaning and context in which life was used shows that;
- I had the time of my life
- I had the best time/year of my life
- I had change my life
- I had Experience a new life
- I started a new life
- I did the best decision of my life
- I smelled/ my life. I touched real life.
- I widen my life
- We saw the heaven of life.
- As can be seen, students used the concept life in both concrete and positive sense.



- **An analysis of the concept love shows that;**
- I LOVED→Every single minute/day, this time, Erasmus, sharing cultures, Eastern Europe, Europe, to be Erasmus person, my Erasmus time, host country
- **An analysis of the concept dream shows that;**
- It was also observed that the students use the concept of dream in two senses;
- That they realized their dreams through the Erasmus experience;
- That their Erasmus experience was like a dream and they saw a dream during this process.
- Both senses encompass a positive meaning and a feeling of excitement.
- **The concept of touched is as follows:**
- Sky, Europea, my dreams, time, endless, happiness, my life, my soul, a dream, the paradise
- **In relation to the use of the Erasmus concept;** The students mentioned that they felt, discovered and loved Erasmus.



- **As for the concept “world”**
- Students used the concept “world” in two senses;
- The concrete and physical sense: to see new places in the world and discover the variety and colours in the world.
- The abstract sense: to see different worlds, to explore their own world
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- **The use of the concept “Europe” is as follows:**
- The students stated that they explored, felt, loved and lived the spirit of Europe and the meaning of EU. It is interesting that the students stated having discovered Europe and living the European spirit although the majority were of European origin. It can be seen that the Erasmus programme helped develop an awareness of Europe and Europeans.
- The students used the experience concept with highly positive adjectives:
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- They described the experience concept with the adjectives “great, wonderful, beautiful, exciting, changing”. Also, they expressed that they experienced a new and different lifestyle and future.
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- **The concept of friends:** The students told that they met friends from different parts of the world and built friendships that would last forever.

## Content analysis of Erasmus experiences



**Table 3: The frequency distribution of the words used in Erasmus experiences**

Range	Word	Frequency	%
1	Erasmus	1007	18.6
2	People	631	11.6
3	Life	599	11.1
4	Friends	462	8.5
5	Experience	450	8.3
6	Time	438	8.1
7	Student	391	7.2
8	New	364	6.7
9	Different	284	5.3
10	Other	253	4.7
11	World	218	4
12	University	165	3
13	Language	157	2.9
	Sum	5419	100

According to the table, the sum of the words in the 13 most frequently used words is

While 156 students used the expression “My Erasmus”, 17 students used “our Erasmus” and 5 students used “your Erasmus”.

The “Erasmus” concept was most frequently used in the Erasmus experiences. It is evident that the students have created an “Erasmus terminology”. This terminology is composed of naturally emerging concepts formed as a result of the students’ experiences. They can express many things that they feel and they understand each other by means of these concepts. The concepts in this terminology could be listed as follows (from the most frequently used to the least frequent):



- Erasmus students
- Erasmus experience
- Erasmus programme
- Erasmus year
- Erasmus friend
- Erasmus life
- Erasmus people
- Erasmus Exchange
- Erasmus time
- Erasmus spirit
- Erasmus family
- Erasmus period
- Erasmus parties
- Erasmus group
- Erasmus semester
- Erasmus scholarship
- Erasmus days
- Erasmus months
- Erasmus babies
- Erasmus trip
- Erasmus word
- Erasmus language
- Erasmus studies
- Erasmus network
- Erasmus Money
- Erasmus society
- Erasmus Dream
- Erasmus girl
- Erasmus night
- Erasmus association
- Erasmus nationality
- Erasmus gift
- Erasmus generation
- Erasmus journey
- Erasmus atmosphere
- Erasmus planet
- Erasmus Project
- Erasmus community
- Erasmus bar
- Erasmus victims
- Erasmus name
- Erasmus section
- Erasmus destination
- Erasmus environment
- Erasmus courses
- Erasmus Story
- Erasmus Nick
- Erasmus World



- The most striking concept is Erasmus Spirit. Erasmus spirit does not have a concise definition; however, what Erasmus spirit encompasses can be listed on the basis of data collected via content analysis.
- The Erasmus spirit includes discovering primarily oneself, new places, new tastes; making new friends, having fun in Erasmus parties, entertainment and travelling. The Erasmus spirit does not contain prejudices, isolation, national, ethnic and religious identities.
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- As expressed by a student;
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- It had no meaning if you were from Poland, Turkey or Greece
- It had no meaning if you were a catholic, muslim or orthodox
- It had no meaning if you liked heavy metal or techno
- It had no meaning if you were straight or gay
- It had no meaning if you liked cats or dogs
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- **There are positive wishes related to the Erasmus program:**
- Viva La Erasmus
- Long live ERASMUS
- ONCE ERASMUS, ALWAYS ERASMUS
- Thanks to the Erasmus, Merci Erasmus!!!
- Happy birthday Erasmus
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- The majority of the students stated that Erasmus changed them and their lives to a great extent.
- They evaluated the process as joyous, enjoyable and productive.
- The number of people expressing gratitude for the Erasmus is unignorable. In addition, they expressed wishes like “God save Erasmus” and “Long live Erasmus”.
- Most of the students expressed that they explored and found about themselves through Erasmus.
- They stated that talking about and describing Erasmus is not easy and that people lacking this experience would have difficulty understanding this.
- Erasmus is highly recommended for everyone. They even describe the process as indescribable and a must for everyone. Some even have recommendations like “Do not attend Erasmus, live Erasmus!”.
- The number of students who state that they will never forget those days is also high.
- Most of the students want to return back to the Erasmus period.
- They think that Erasmus is not “a waste of time”.
- They long for the Erasmus period and friends.
- Some evaluate Erasmus as a chance.
- Students state that Erasmus never ends. It could be argued that its effect continues despite having ended as an action.
- Five students stated they found their husbands and five stated they found their wives in this experience.
- Many students think that Erasmus has created a new culture.



- There are even people who identify themselves with Erasmus and go so far as to say “We were Erasmus.”
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- They evaluated Erasmus as an important period in their lives.
- A student pointed to similarities between Plato’s metaphor of cave and Erasmus.
- There are even some who say “I wish I could stay as an Erasmus student forever”.
- The number of students saying “Erasmus was the best decision in my life” is quite high.
- The students stated that they became more positive thanks to Erasmus.
- Again, the number of people wishing to participate in the Erasmus program is quite high.
- There are a few students who separate their lives into two periods: Pre-Erasmus and Post-Erasmus.
- There are many students who think that Erasmus put an end to their routine life and made them more European.
- There are only a few students who think that the Erasmus funding was insufficient.



new

- **The second most frequently used word is People.**
- It can be observed that expressions related to meeting people from and different cultures, and the expressions “there aren't people categories”, “unite people in diversity”, “Erasmus people were/are unique” are frequently used. The students also pointed to the fact that people are very similar to each other and could be close to each other despite coming from distant places and mentioned the shared beauties. It can also be seen that the adjectives used in relation to the concept of people have highly positive connotations: wonderful, special, fantastic, important, good, great, enjoy, the best, the nicest, the greatest, happy, friendly people.
- The description of a new person type is evident: **Erasmus people.**
- **As can be seen, an otherisation is not present here.**
- **On the contrary, students emphasized forming a unity despite the differences.**
- It was observed that the concept of people was used negatively in only three places.
- 1. **bad people:** A student mentioned her worries about being stalked by a male stranger she met in the tram while searching for accommodation and stated that it was difficult for her to save herself from the man.
- 2. **shallow people;** A student mentioned the presence of some shallow people who became drunk in parties.
- 3. A French student (going to Italy) conceived of Erasmus as a waste of great amounts of money and thought that young people used this money for alcohol and drugs.
- He had witnessed that the students used most of their time consuming alcohol and drugs in Erasmus bars.



- The most frequent use of the “life” concept is “the best day/time/year/period/part/decision of my life”. Another frequently mentioned thing was that the Erasmus experience changed their lives.
- A negative use of the life concept was not observed.
- Two new uses of the life concept was noted:
- **Erasmus life** = The time period spent as an Erasmus student in the host country.
- **European Life** = Making friends from different European societies, travelling and discovering European life.



- They made friends from different cultures and countries and built good friendships and relationships. Shared activities like travelling with friends, going to the cinema and theatre, etc. were mentioned frequently.
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- The majority of the students talked about the loneliness and the things they suffered from in the first days; however also mentioned that they overcame many difficulties soon by making new friends and built firm relationships.
- The number of people visiting their friends after Erasmus is unignorable. It is evident that the discovery of different places and cultures continues with friend visits after Erasmus.



- The fact that the Erasmus experience was highly fruitful and beautiful was emphasized by students. No negative opinions were observed in relation to experience. A student even said: “Have you ever met somebody with a bad experience on Erasmus program? Stop searching, you will not find it!”.



- The most frequently used expression in the time concept was “First time”. The students expressed that they lived the advantage of being in a different country and culture for the first time and felt pleased about this.
- The students evaluated the Erasmus period in a highly positive way. Only two students viewed the period as difficult times.



- Students frequently stated that they viewed different dimension of life, looked at life from different angles, learnt about different cultures, languages, worlds; tasted different meals, spices and made friends from different cultures.
- A student said “Everything was different; I was feeling like I was living in another planet”.
- No expressions related to the problems created by differences were observed. A student even said “We were so different and so similar at the same time”.

It can be seen that the word “other” was not used in the sense of otherisation, isolation or discrimination.

## **University**

- Although the main aim and function of the Erasmus program is concerned with university education, the concept of university was not frequently used in the students' experiences.
- The academic environment, educational system, relationships with the faculty were not mentioned frequently. For instance, the concept of library was used only four times. Usually the university names were mentioned.

# Language



The process of learning a new language was frequently mentioned. The emphasis was on communication despite speaking different languages by making use of body language where possible and even creating a new Erasmus language.

"Erasmus language", is not English, Spanish or French...

- It is the best way to understand the sense of living without speaking, just acting

I discovered sign language and body language!

It could be argued that the effect of shared experiences with Erasmus students from different countries may have had a big influence over conversing in not only one but also a few other languages.



- **In conclusion:**

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- In this study, it is observed that the students talked highly positively about the Erasmus experience. The students described this process as enjoyable and productive. It could be argued that the Erasmus experience contributed to students' individual development rather than academic development.

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- It could also be maintained that one of the key purposes of the Erasmus exchange program is to remove prejudices by maintaining student mobility and cross-cultural dialogue and to unite societies under the EUROPEAN AWARENESS and EUROPEAN PEOPLE understanding via strengthening interactions between EU member citizens. Data collected in this study present evidence that the Erasmus programme has reached this aim.