

## **Functional Evaluation of student mobility:**

### **The case study of T.E.I. of Athens**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

The last 5 years TEI of Athens has developed a program of Functional Evaluation of student Mobility with the help of questionnaires. Three quarters of the responders were male; most of them participated in the Erasmus program for studies and one third of them for placements. From the statistical elaboration of the answered questionnaires, the most important issues that came to light were the language preparation and the information/support in matters of accommodation as well as the functionality of the ECTS system. However, a great percentage of the responders feel “satisfied” with the recognition of the courses and half of them associate their participation to the program with the extension of their studies’ period. Finding a solution to the aforementioned issues demands of combined actions undertaken by the National Authorities and Agencies, the Higher Education Institutions and the relevant Departments, but the financial support of those actions remains always the “dark side” of this matter.

## **MAIN PAPER**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Technological Educational Institute (T.E.I) of Athens is the third biggest Institute of Higher Education in Greece, with approximately 35.000 students. It has five Faculties with a total of thirty six departments and it covers almost all the scientific and technological Disciplines.

During the last 5 years, a program of self-assessment of his students, who have participated in LLP/ ERASMUS program, and who had moved abroad for studies or practical training, was held in T.E.I. of Athens in a systematic way. The system of self-assessment was implemented via anonymous questionnaire answered by the students, structured in adequate way to be suitable for statistical elaboration.

### **AIM OF THE PROJECT**

The objective of self- assessment is the investigation of students' opinion on the following issues:

a. organisation of the mobility by Sending Institutions, b. organisation of studies in Receiving Institutions c. functionality of the action, d. added value offered by the program to the students in terms of socialization, interculturality and competitiveness.

In this presentation, the results of the self-assessment concerning the main functional problems of the mobility are presented, in accordance with the students' perception, and a first explanatory approach of these results is attempted.

### **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

The research sample consists of 195 students of TEI of Athens who participated in the mobility of the LLP/Erasmus programme and answered anonymously the relevant questionnaires.

The responders' replies were elaborated in methods of descriptive and estimate statistics. The statistical data is presented in the form of frequency tables and/or graphic representations.

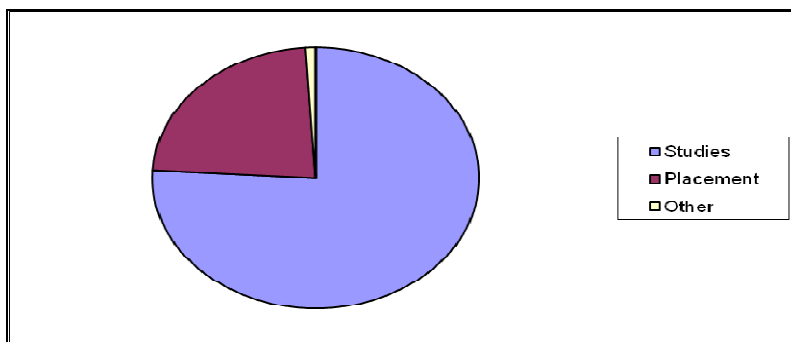
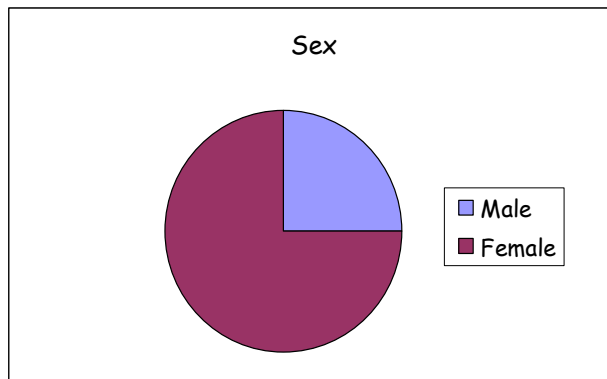
$X^2$  test was applied to establish possible correlations between two factors.

## RESULTS

From a first processing of the findings, the following results are available:

The proportion between male and female students is 3:1 (see figure 1). In addition, the proportion of the students who participated in the mobility programme for studies against those who moved under the framework of work placement is again 3:1 (see figure 2).

**Figure 1**



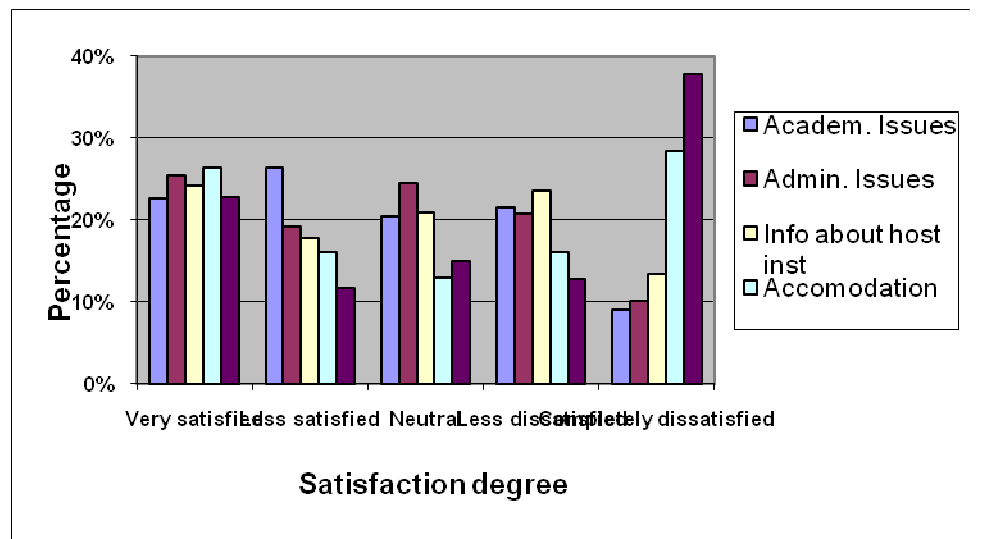
**Figure 2**

In the question: “Were you satisfied with the support/information/advice offered by the sending institution during your stay abroad?” there has been a graduation of answers from 1 to 5, where 1 stands for “very satisfied” and 5 for “completely dissatisfied”.

The difference in scale of students’ satisfaction, regarding the support offered by TEI of Athens was focused on the following areas:

- Academic matters concerning their stay abroad
- Administrative matters concerning their stay abroad
- Information about the host institution and the country
- Accommodation matters
- Language preparation

Based on this statistical elaboration regarding the aforementioned question, the language preparation proved to be the main problem of the support we offer to our students (38% of completely dissatisfied students), while there is an important number of students who feel that they have not received the expected help in matters of accommodation (see figure 3).

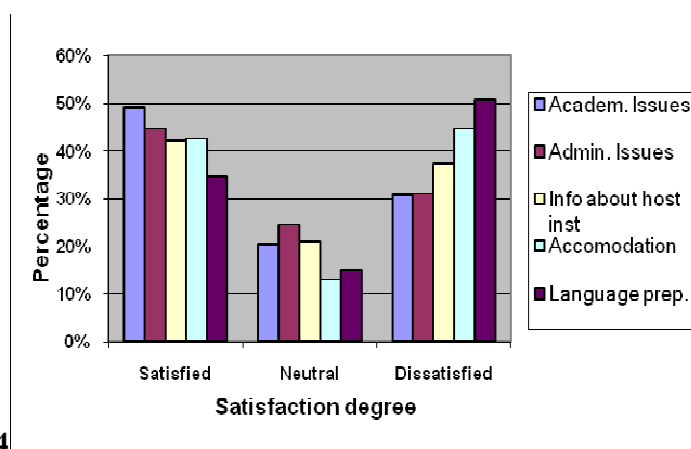


**Figure 3**

Regarding the aforementioned question, if we group the very satisfied students with the less satisfied ones, as well as the very dissatisfied students with the less

dissatisfied ones, and we create three answering groups, the findings mentioned become more obvious:

- 51% of the students feel dissatisfied with the language preparation that we have offered them against a 34% of students who feel satisfied, and
- in matters of accommodation, 45% of the students feel dissatisfied with the support they have received by our Institution against a 42% who feel satisfied (see figure 4).



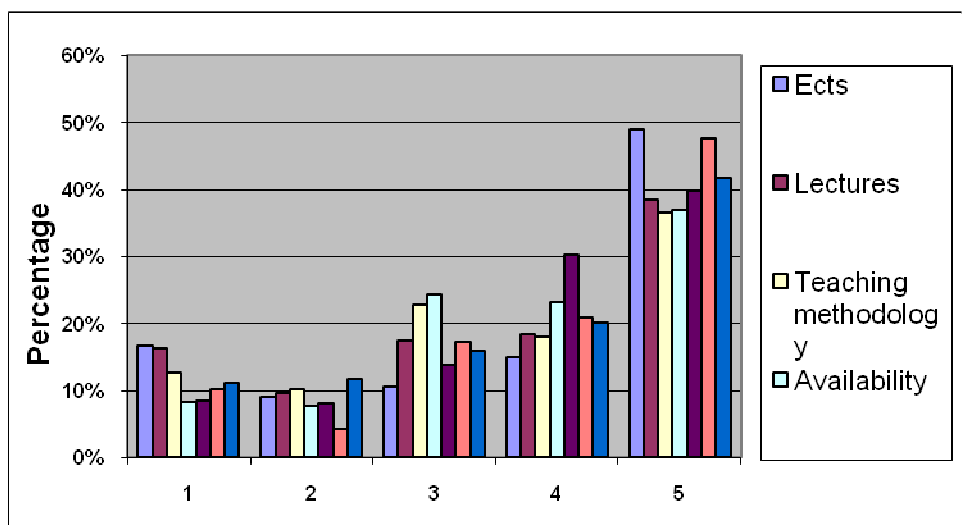
**Figure 4**

In the question: “Concerning the following areas, did you face any problems during your stay abroad?” in a scale of 1 to 5, 1 stands for “at a great extent” and 5 for “not at all” (see figure 5).

The problems our students had to face were as follows:

- Credit Transfer and Accumulation (ECTS)
- Attending lectures in the foreign language
- Differences in the teaching methodology used
- Teaching staff availability
- Communication difficulties
- Administrative matters

From the statistical elaboration of the responders’ answers it is obvious that our students do not face significant problems during their stay abroad, despite a certain deficiency in language preparation!



**Figure 5**

In the question: “Was the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System applied to the study programme of the host Institution?” with the following preselected answers given:

- Yes, partially
- Yes, totally
- No

The most significant result is that an increased percentage (22,5%) of students DOES NOT ANSWER AT ALL.

Instead, from the answers given, the overwhelming majority (99%) answers that the ECTS was applied totally or partially at the host Institution.

**Figure 6**

ECTS in host Institution	Sample size	%	%
Yes, partially	55	28,21%	36,42%
Yes, totally	94	48,21%	62,25%

<b>No</b>	2	1,03%	1,32%
<b>N/A</b>	44	22,56%	
<b>Total</b>	195	100,00%	100,00%

Relating to the previous question, the preselected answers given to the following question “Were lessons, which you attended with a successful result, acknowledged by your Institution?” are:

- Yes
- No
- Partially

The percentage of the responders, who do not answer at all, is even more significant (36%), and this shows that the previous findings are not random.

It seems that a great number of students is not familiarized with and/or informed about the ECTS system.

<b>Acknowledged lessons</b>	<b>Sample size</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Yes</b>	82	42,05%	65,60%
<b>No</b>	25	12,82%	20,00%
<b>Partially</b>	18	9,23%	14,40%
<b>N/A</b>	70	35,90%	
<b>Total</b>	195	100,00%	100,00%

**Figure 7**

Maybe of course, the most astounding finding of all, results from the students’ replies in the question: “Has your stay abroad prolonged the total duration of your studies?”, at which 1 out of 2 students answered that their stay abroad did indeed result in the prolongation of their studies! This factor in particular seems to be statistically independent from all the rest factors.

## **DISCUSSION**

The results of the “Functional evaluation of TEI of Athens Student Mobility” verify the general findings of the evaluation of the students’ mobility under the LLP Erasmus programme in European level (M.S.Otero and A. McCoshan -2006) and support them at a great extent.

- The percentage of female students of TEI of Athens participating in the mobility programme is one of the highest in Europe (75%). The average ratio in Europe is 60% for female students against 40% for male students.
- The high percentage of students of TEI of Athens who feel disappointed regarding the language preparation offered, reflects the programme’s high demands for competences in foreign languages.

Based on the aforementioned report it is ascertained that “ERASMUS students are highly competent in foreign languages. As would be expected, the vast majority of them speak at least two languages (97%), three quarters (75%) had some competence in at least three languages and around a third (31%) in four languages.”

- A great number of the students of TEI of Athens who participated in the LLP/Erasmus mobility programme would like to have received more information on accommodation matters. This is logical since it is true that “ERASMUS students have to make an important investment in terms of accommodation”, according to the aforementioned report.
- The vast majority of the students who participate in the programme finally attend classes at the host institutions without problems.
- A high percentage of students of TEI of Athens have not understood/been informed of the use of the ECTS system at the home institution as well as at the host institution abroad.
- “Just over a quarter of ERASMUS students who replied to the survey, in European level, reported that their degree would take longer to complete, given their ERASMUS period abroad, due to time being added to their degree, problems adapting to the new system, problems of recognition or other factors”. The relevant percentage amongst students of TEI of Athens is over 50%.

## **CONCLUSIONS**



The main results of the “Functional Evaluation of TEI of Athens Student Mobility” are compatible with the results of the LLP/Erasmus assessment on a European level, as these are recorded in the document “*The Impact of ERASMUS on European Higher Education: Quality, Openness and Internationalisation – Executive Summary, December 2008*”.

Based on this Executive Summary, TEI of Athens should prioritize support and materialization of the following recommendations amongst those summarized in the aforementioned document:

- Recommendations and innovations on the level of national authorities and agencies
  1. Support a uniform implementation of ECTS and the Diploma Supplement in higher education institutions.
  2. Stimulate language education in secondary education.
- Recommendations and innovations on the institutional level – Central management
  1. Be active in creating a good service infrastructure for student mobility (such as public relations, international offices, professional internationalization staff) and in providing student accommodation (e.g. use of online booking systems through which mobile students can arrange their accommodation in advance) and other services.
  2. Provide more language training opportunities for mobile students and staff.  
E-Cultural and Linguistic Guides that have been produced by our Institute, is one of our initiatives under this concept.
- Recommendations and innovations on the institutional level – Academic departments
  - 1. Give positive and objective information about student mobility and promote it as a part of the study programmes at an early stage.
  - 2. Use mobile student’s feedback (e.g. use Erasmus Ambassadors) to inspire potential new mobile students, e.g. through seminars and information fairs.
  - 3. Increase the awareness of centralized actions amongst Erasmus coordinators.

- 4. Try to remove mobility barriers in areas such as recognition, language training and differences in the academic calendars.
- 5. Reduce the internal bureaucracy around student mobility and do not add unnecessary complementary information request to EU forms.

Furthermore, we should take into consideration on a central European level that:

1. the existence of a risk of setting mobility barriers to students who originate from countries of less spoken languages is eminent, and therefore initiatives should be taken for combating this risk,
2. it is important to investigate and to encounter the reasons for which Erasmus students tend to elongate their studies,
3. it is obvious that the solution to the aforementioned demands of an increased investment to human capital on behalf of the Institutions, as well as of a general increase to the programme's functional expenses. Unfortunately, it has been evident for more than 10 years now that the ERASMUS programme is sub-financed (An. Barblian and Ul. Teichler, 1998). Delegating the responsibility for finding a solution to the problem mainly to the National Authorities and Agencies and secondly to the Higher Education Institutions with the recommendation to look for supplementary sources of financing (The Impact of ERASMUS on European Higher Education: Quality, Openness and Internationalization, Dec. 2008) is uncertain to bring the desired result.

## **REFERENCES**

- *Andris Barblan and Ulrich Teichler, University Responsibility for European Cooperation and Mobility, Association of European Universities (CRE), 1998*
- *Manuel Souto Otero and Andrew McCoshan: Survey of the Socio-Economic Background of ERASMUS Students(DG EAC 01/05) Final Report (2006)*
- *European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture, The Impact of ERASMUS on European Higher Education: Quality, Openness and Internationalization, December 2008*