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Graduate Students' Perspectives on Their Acquired Skills Following the Erasmus+ Programme

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Abstract: Graduate skills are a key factor in their selection in a company. This research focuses on the extent to which the Erasmus+ mobility programme contributes to the development of skills required for a modern work environment. Thus, the paper examines whether the skills developed through an Erasmus+ programme are recognised as important by European employers. The results of the primary quantitative online survey showed that graduates developed adaptability, flexibility, enthusiasm, dynamism, professionalism, responsibility, commitment, and creative problem-solving skills through their participation in the Erasmus+ programme. Even if the Erasmus+ programme appears to enhance

a variety of talents, there are some others, such the improvement of interpersonal skills, which are less well-developed. An important conclusion of this study is that young people's participation in the Erasmus+ programme, in terms of study or internship, contributes to their desire to work in an international context, while a prolonged participation in the programme is positively correlated with the development of communication skills.

Keywords: Erasmus+ Programme, Employee Skills, European Employers.

Introduction

The recent studies show that the development of soft skills in students through their participation in the Erasmus programme is related to their future professional career and smooth integration into the labour market (Cairns, 2019). Soft skills, according to Marin-Zapata et al. (2021), are a set of widely used or generic skills that are non-technical in nature and can be applied in a variety of work environments. Skills are often categorised as interpersonal, people skills, and behavioural skills that emphasize personal behaviour and the management of interpersonal relationships (Hendarman & Cantner, 2018). However, in the labour market, research has shown that employers expressed a need and desire for high-quality soft skills in the modern workforce, such as good communication skills, interpersonal skills, collaboration and teamwork, as well as problem-solving skills (Ellis et al., 2014; Engel, 2010; ErasmusJobs, 2021; Ghani et al., 2018; Nickson et al., 2012).

As the Erasmus programme is the best known and most fundamental mobility program in Europe, there is a strong research interest regarding its impact and the extent to which they fulfil the original goals of the program.

Soft skills self-evaluations gained by program participants are crucial to get an initial impression of how well Erasmus is meeting its stated goals in terms of its long-term effects on young people's employability. Additionally, a comparison of the supply and demand for soft skills in the Greek labour market will show the potential gap between the two, as well as suggest ways to bridge it.

Literature Review

(Qualitative) Soft Skills

Whitmore and Fry (1974) were among the first researchers to propose a classification of skills into two categories: soft and hard skills. The first refers to work and can be applied in a variety of work environments, while the second refers to the know-how required for a job (Marin-Zapata et al., 2021). Furthermore, Succi and Canovi (2020) state that soft skills are a dynamic combination of cognitive and metacognitive, interpersonal, intellectual, and practical skills. In other words, they consider that soft skills help people positively adapting and behaving so that they can effectively manage the challenges of their professional and daily lives.

Although soft skills are important in all work contexts, previous studies have found that employers' requirements with these types of skills are not being met. These surveys have shown that employers seek employees with high-quality soft skills such as communication, interpersonal relationships, collaboration, and analytical skills (Engel, 2010; Nickson et al., 2012).

The Erasmus+ Programme structure and figures in Europe and Greece

The fundamental component of the Erasmus+ programme is students' exchanges between partner countries for duration of three to twelve months. The visiting student enrolls in a department in their area of study during this time to complete their studies in the host institution (Cairns, 2019). Since 2007,

program participants have had the option to perform a 3- to 12-month internship with a business or non-profit.

According to estimates, the program has helped at least 4 million Europeans (students and academic staff) move about throughout its 30 years of operation, making it an example of cross-border cooperation and a tool for promoting intercultural learning (Cairns, 2019). When the mobility program was first established in 1987/1988, 3,000 students from 11 other countries participated. By 2002/2003, however, that number had risen to approximately 124,000.

Since 2007, when it became possible to do an internship abroad, the number of participation significantly increased. In 2007–2008, 182,700 students participated; in 2017–2018, it nearly doubled to 347,100 (Centre for European Progression, 2017). 33 countries are already participating in the Program's execution, including non-EU nations like Turkey, Serbia, Norway, Liechtenstein and others (Centre for European Progression, 2017). The Erasmus+ program provided about 940,000 people with the opportunity to study, work, volunteer, and take part in community engagement initiatives abroad in 2019, according to more recent figures. In 2019, the program's budget totalled 3.37 billion (European Commission, 2020).

Since the beginning of the Erasmus programme in 1987, Greece has taken part in it. A total of 19,454 people benefited from the program in 2018–2019, including 10,071 higher education students who studied or completed an internship abroad. The number of Greek students traveling abroad for study and internships rose from 4,156 in 2014–2015 to 5,264 in 2016–2017 and 5,667 in 2018–2019, reflecting a gradual rise in participation in the program. As an example, Greece hosted 3,675 Erasmus students in 2014–2015 that increased to 4,759 in 2016–2017 and 5,476 in 2018–2019 (European Commission, 2021). On the other side, inbound migration is comparable to outward movement.

In Greece, the Program's budget for 2018/2019 totalled €40.9 billion. It should be noted that the expected budget for Erasmus+ for the 2021–2027 programming term is €26.2 billion, nearly twice as much as it was for the 2014–2020 programming period (European Commission, 2021).

The Erasmus Programme & Soft Skills Development

Student mobility is by far the most supported measure by European higher education policy makers in the context of promoting internationalisation processes (de Wit, 2019). Particularly, the Erasmus programme is an important milestone in the history of education policy at the European level, even though it took more than 20 years since the Treaty of Rome to give it an official supranational dimension and another 17 years to create the flagship Erasmus programme (Ribeiro, 2021).

The main element of the program is the exchange of students between countries as part of their studies, with a stay in another country and study in another college, for a period of 3 to 12 months. During this period, the visiting student is enrolled in a department of their field of study so that they can continue studies in the host country (Cairns, 2019). Since 2007, students in the program had the opportunity to complete an internship in a company or organisation for a period of 3 to 12 months. In recent years, special emphasis was placed on the skills developed through this program, as the participation of young people was a good opportunity to prepare for their integration into the globalised labour market and society (Erasmus Skills, 2021). Erasmus was created not just to unite young people but also to integrate cultural groups from various EU member states and other countries, promoting greater tolerance for other peoples' cultures and civilizations as well as greater awareness of common European ideals (Cairns et al., 2018).

Additionally, it offers the chance to gain knowledge about residing and working abroad. Young

people who travel abroad as part of the Erasmus program gain knowledge and abilities. It "opens the door" to enter the next level of school or employment. The extent of their new educational and employment prospects is expanding at the same time, both domestically and internationally (Cairns et al., 2018).

The Erasmus Impact Study offers crucial information in the impact of Erasmus Programme over Soft Skills Development (European Commission, 2019). According to the report, taking part in Erasmus+ is associated with the growth of skills necessary for employment and social cohesion. Almost 9 out of 10 participants report improvements in soft skills like adaptability, interactions with people from different cultures, communication skills, and intercultural competence, while about 5 out of 10 participants reported improvements in their digital skills because of their participation in the exchange program. Soft skills are those that are considered important for employment. More than 90% of participants assumed they increased their ability to engage with people from diverse cultures, which is considered a key component of social cohesiveness. When compared to graduates who did not engage in Erasmus+, participants showed stronger improvements in these sorts of competencies (European Commission, 2019).

The same study also shows how Erasmus+ has an effect on participants' academic growth, social involvement, personality development, and intercultural openness. Particularly for those who relocated to non-neighbouring countries from their place of origin, it was discovered that taking part in Erasmus+ strengthened participants' feelings of European identification (European Commission, 2019).

Additionally, a study by the Erasmus Student Network revealed that participating in Erasmus had a positive effect on graduates' personal development because the mobility affected their participation in society as engaged citizens as well as their social, civic, and democratic participation (Perez-Encinas et al., 2021). In particular, the study revealed that 6 out of 10 graduates were familiar with the meaning of the term "civic participation" and that 1 out of 3 was well-informed about the activities of local civil society. Additionally, the study reveals that students who have participated in an Erasmus exchange are significantly more involved in civil society organisations than the typical European young person (European Student Network, 2021b).

Students are aware that career advancement depends on personal growth and that employers may place an equal value on soft skills and academic qualifications (Cairns et al., 2018).

The Erasmus+ Programme and Employability

According to Confalonieri et al. (2016), the academic mobility is an important way for young people to improve their future employability and acquire new professional skills while developing as active citizens. Students who participate in a mobility program can develop the right combination of subject-specific skills and soft skills that enable both a successful and rapid transition into the labour market.

Participants in the program have the chance to considerably improve their CVs, increase their chances of finding future employment, and raise their level of work competence, giving them an advantage in the labour market (Deakin, 2014). Enhancing intercultural skills, through interactions with individuals or groups of individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds, is also a key goal of the curriculum, leading to mutual tolerance for variety. Simply put, all Erasmus participants are intended to increase cultural awareness of the various facets of citizenship in Europe and build skills that will improve their employment (Cairns et al., 2018).

Rodrigues (2013) also found that student mobility was associated with a higher likelihood of going

abroad again to study or work after graduation. In addition, a study conducted by the European Commission looking at the impact of Erasmus on employability came to an important conclusion: graduates with international experience had better chances in the labour market and their unemployment rate was lower (Brandenburg et al., 2015).

In conclusion, participation in Erasmus can contribute to the development of skills and the redesign of higher education curricula to ensure that graduates have developed high-quality soft skills (van Kemenade, 2012; Cimatti, 2016).

The ErasmusJobs project's investigation concerned the skills acquired through the Erasmus+ mobility programme and the abilities required by employers as well as the coincidence and significance in terms of the Erasmus programme. A survey was conducted in late 2020 through the aforementioned project with 55 employers, HR managers, in enterprises with European headquarters. The poll was performed both online and in person.

This study's objective was to determine the essential talents that companies in Europe were looking for and compare them to the capabilities that Erasmus+ graduates had already attained. In the study, employers were asked to rate the importance of a set of transferable skills before listing the three crucial skills they believe are most important when hiring a new employee. Finally, they were asked to indicate the significance they give to a new employee candidate's international experience gained through the Erasmus program (ErasmusJobs, 2021).

According to the findings, the top three sets of soft skills that employers look for when hiring new workers were: adaptability, flexibility, and agility skills (reported by 21.2% of employers); motivation, enthusiasm, passion, positivity, drive, and dynamism (18.8%); communication skills (17.6%); and professionalism, responsibility, commitment, work ethic, and performance skills (17.6%). Other skill sets included innovative problem-solving (12.9%) and initiative (11.8%), in that order.

Significant focus has been placed on the skills obtained through the Erasmus+ programme, since young people's participation is a good opportunity to prepare for their integration into the globalised job market and society (Erasmus Skills, 2021).

Mechanisms for assessing the impact of the Erasmus+ programme on soft skill development and employability

European Skills/ Competencies, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO), a comprehensive initiative for the classification and assessment of competencies in all sectors within the European Community, has been in development by the European Union (EU) since 2016. In accordance with the levels of the European Qualifications Framework, the ESCO classification defines groups of skills/competences and groups of qualifications.

The Erasmus Skills program has been in place since 2018 and aimed giving higher education institutions the tools they needed to enhance the educational experience of program participants. This was effectuated to better understand how Erasmus affects the development of skills. Mobility participants have the chance to assess the outcomes of their participation in terms of the skills they have acquired through the Erasmus Skills program. The main goal of the project was to increase students' understanding of the process they were participating in through the exchange and how this will affect their own personal growth and skill set as well as their role as contributing members of society. The creation of a self-assessment tool for students' mobility outcomes was part of the project in this context, and other project outputs included the delivery of online training for students on European citizenship and the Erasmus+ program, the creation of a guide for higher education professionals to assist and

support students in their personal development, and finally the introduction of a methodology to support academic staff in higher education in the development of their own research.

Students evaluated their Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes (KSA) in the framework of their self-assessment through a platform that has been expressly built (European Student Network, 2021a). Students also evaluated the soft skills they have acquired in the context of their own skill evaluation (Erasmus Skills, 2021a).

It should be noted that the Erasmus Jobs (<https://www.erasmusjobs.org/>) initiative is expected to create an online platform to improve the employability of Erasmus graduates. On this portal, Erasmus students and alumni will be able to create an individual profile that reflects the skills they have gained through volunteering, mobility experiences, and other activities. Employers, on the other hand, will benefit from the platform's assistance in locating qualified candidates. Employers will be able to create a company profile to attract candidates. Furthermore, the platform will provide universities and career services with a one-of-a-kind tool to help students establish skill profiles and transition to the workforce (ErasmusJobs, 2021).

Research Methodology

In this paper, the primary research was conducted following a quantitative approach. Through a quantitative research, it was possible to select large samples in a short period of time, unlike qualitative methods where data collection was time consuming, and samples were small at the same time. With a larger sample, it was more likely that the research will lead to an accurate generalised conclusion and more reliable results, while at the same time it was less likely that outliers will negatively affect the results (Papageorgiou, 2015).

Considering the basic purpose of this work, a quantitative research was considered the optimal method, as it was an extension of the study conducted within the ErasmusJobs project – with Greek data – (ErasmusJobs, 2021).

Finally, many studies that have investigated the impact of the Erasmus programme on the development of students' soft skills have been quantitatively conducted (Krzaklewska & Krupnik, 2005; Brandenburg et al., 2015; Bryła, 2015; Martínez-Usarralde et al., 2017; Baranova et al., 2020; Tran et al., 2021).

Study Population

The study residents consisted of the students who participated in the Erasmus mobility programme in Greece. The number of participants was N = 150 graduates. A random sample was drawn as the survey was conducted online and the participants in this study were self-selected.

Purpose & Research Questions

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the extent to which the participation of then students in the Erasmus mobility programme and current graduates (both employed and not) contributed to the development of (qualitative) soft skills. It also aimed to measure the degree of correspondence between the soft skills that employers recognised as important for the workplace and the soft skills that graduates and Erasmus participants perceived themselves to have acquired through their participation in the programme.

Measurement Tool

In the research a structured questionnaire with closed – questions was used. The questionnaire

was designed after studying the international literature and based on the study of the ErasmusJobs project. The questionnaire was divided into the following three sections:

- i. The first section deal with the demographic and occupational characteristics of the participants in the study.
- ii. The second section deal with the basic elements for participation in the Erasmus programme.
- iii. The third section contained the basic research questions. The questions concerned the skills acquired or developed by the participants after completing the Erasmus programme.

Method of Data Collection

The research was conducted online, and the questionnaire was created on the Google Forms platform. It was then posted on selected group pages on an official social network in order to collect responses. The groups where it was posted were related to people connected to Erasmus, such as groups of Erasmus+ students and graduates in Greece. The questionnaire took no more than 10 minutes to complete. The data was collected from 03/12/2021 to 26/12/2021.

Method of Data Analysis

At the end of the period, a data file was created and analysed using the statistical programme SPSS Statistics 2.5.

Research Results

Reliability Check

The reliability of the research instrument was examined using Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient. The results showed that the overall reliability of the questionnaire was high for all 32 questions and is 0.950. A similar high reliability was also found in the other two sub-sections of the questionnaire where the alpha was 0.936 for a total of 30 questions and 0.909 for a total of 25 questions. These results showed that it was a reliable research instrument that could be used in other similar studies.

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

According to the results of the 150 participants, 67.3% (N=101) of them were women and 32.7% (N=49) were men. The age group with the highest incidence rate was between 18 and 25 years old (N=89, N%=59.3%). In terms of educational level, 61.3% (N=92) had a bachelor's degree, 36.7% (N=55) had a master's degree and only 2% (N=3) had a PhD. Regarding the employment status of the participants, 68% (N=102) reported that they were employed, 22% (N=33) that they were unemployed and 10% (N=15) that they were not employed, i.e. they were not looking for work during this period. Of those who reported being employed, 90.1% (N=100) worked in a private company and 9.9% (N=11) in a public company/organisation. The academic field where 30.7% (N=46) of the participants graduated was social sciences. Then 23.3% (N=35) graduated in engineering and technology, 20.7% (N=31) in humanities and arts and 10.7% (N=16) in medicine and health sciences. The percentage of those with a degree in natural sciences (N=14, N%=9.3%) and agricultural sciences & veterinary medicine (N=8, N%=5.3%) was lower.

Data on Participation in the Erasmus Programme

Regarding the reason for participation, 66.7% (N=100) of the sample indicated that their

participation was for study, while 20.7% (N=31) wanted to do an internship. Then, the majority of the sample, i.e. 48% (N=72) answered that their participation in the programme lasted for 6 months, 41.3% (N=62) of the participants answered that their participation in the programme was shorter than 6 months, 9.3% (N=14) participated for 1 year and 1.3% (N=2) said that they participated for more than 1 year.

In addition, participants whose semester of study was shorter are expected to be less interested in learning about what is happening in the world on a daily basis ($r=-0.199$), less knowledgeable about social and political concepts such as democracy, justice, equality, citizenship, and civil rights ($r=-0.222$), and less engaged in a shared vision with others ($r=0.191$) (Table 1).

In addition, participants who have participated in the Erasmus programme for a longer period of time are expected to be able to plan and organise work-related activities ($r=0.195$), feel more able to take on professional tasks with high responsibility after their stay abroad ($r=0.181$), use the internet, social media and PC, e.g. for their studies, work and personal activities ($r=0.200$), have a clearer idea of their professional ambitions and goals ($r=0.161$), have better communication skills ($r=0.184$) than those who had a shorter participation period. Last but not least, participants who took part in the Erasmus program for a longer period of time reported feeling less European ($r=-0.203$) (Table 1).

Table 1

Investigating Correlations

	Reason for participating in the Erasmus programme	Semester of study where participation in the Erasmus programme took place	Duration of participation in the Erasmus Programme
I would like to work in an international context	0,190*		
I can plan and organise activities related to my work			0,195*
I feel more able to take on professional tasks with high responsibility after my stay abroad			0,181*
I am more interested in learning what is happening in the world everyday		-0,199*	
I use the internet, social networks and computers, e.g. for my studies, work and personal activities			0,200*
I have a clear idea of my career aspirations and goals			0,161*
I am more aware of social and political concepts such as democracy, justice, equality, citizenship and civil rights		-0,222**	
I feel more European			-0,203*
I have shared vision with others		-0,191*	
I think I have communication skills			0,184*

I think I have professionalism, responsibility, commitment, ethics, ability to perform			0,170*
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*p-level = 0.05 **p-level=0.01

Source: authors' own development.

Discussion

Soft skills are seen as essential to meet labour market challenges such as the increasing pace of globalisation, cultural diversity in organisations and the growing need to retain talent in companies (Garcia-Esteban & Jahnke, 2020; Wagenaar, 2020). Both official studies by European institutions and studies in the academic literature have found that Erasmus could have a positive impact on students' employability (Confalonieri et al., 2016; European Commission, 2019; Caparros-Ruiz, 2019).

The research explored the contribution of participation in the Erasmus programme to the development and/or enhancement of graduates' soft skills, which are considered important in the labour market and employability, in order to determine whether there may be a mismatch between the supply and demand of soft skills in the country. The study participants considered that they have developed skills such as adaptability, flexibility and resourcefulness, as well as skills such as motivation, enthusiasm, passion, positivity, drive and dynamism. After that, participants indicated that they have developed skills such as professionalism, responsibility, commitment, ethics and performance, and in similar percentages they judged that their participation in the programme has contributed to the development of creative problem-solving skills.

However, Table 2 shows that the soft skills most in demand by employers in Europe according to the ErasmusJobs Study (2021) are compared to those most developed by the participants in this study after their participation in the Erasmus programme.

Table 2

Comparison of the Skills of the Erasmus Graduates in the Sample and the Skills Required by Employers in Europe Based on the Erasmus Jobs Survey (2021)

Soft skills that employers demand	Soft skills from research participants
1. Adaptability, flexibility, nimbleness	1. Adaptability, flexibility, nimbleness
2. Motivation, enthusiasm, passion, positivity, drive, dynamism	2. Motivation, enthusiasm, passion, positivity, drive, dynamism
3. Communication skills	3. Professionalism, responsibility, commitment, ethics, ability to perform
4. Professionalism, responsibility, commitment, work ethic, ability to perform	4. Creative problem solving
5. Creative problem solving	5. Proactivity, taking initiative
6. Proactivity, taking initiative	6. Communication skills

Source: authors' own development.

So, from the above comparison, the first thing that emerges is that there is a match in the first two groups of soft skills. The employers in the ErasmusJobs Survey (2021) considered the skills adaptability, flexibility and resourcefulness to be more important, as well as the skills motivation, enthusiasm, passion, positivity, drive and dynamism, and on the other hand, the Erasmus graduates in our survey considered that the same skills have developed more through their participation in the mobility

programme. On the other hand, discrepancies between skills were also found in this survey. Communication skills were the most important, ranking third among employers but with the lowest average score among participants in this survey. The ranking of the remaining three skill groups, namely professionalism, responsibility, commitment, ethics and performance, creative problem solving, and initiative and enterprise, followed the same order of importance in the two studies.

Conclusions and Implications

The appropriate development of university students' soft skills, which are necessary in the modern labour market, is a topic that has been studied extensively in the literature in recent years. However, few studies to date have looked at the role of the Erasmus mobility programme in the development of graduate soft skills and its efficacy to fill such skills gaps in the labour market and thus improve employability. This study examined the extent to which the participation of former students and current graduates (with and without employment) in the Erasmus Mobility Programme has contributed to the development of soft skills and qualitative soft skills that are now considered essential for student employability due to the demand of employers in the labour market.

The participation in Erasmus can contribute to the development of skills and the redesign of higher education curricula to ensure that graduates have developed high-quality soft skills (van Kemenade, 2012; Cimatti, 2016).

The design of quality mobility programs is imperative to enhance the benefits of the Erasmus programme, since, for example, Confalonieri's et al. (2016) study identified some weak points that need to be improved to enhance the impact of the programme on employability. These included improving the system of recognition of study abroad and financial support, particularly for students from disadvantaged groups.

Host nations and institutions participating in the Erasmus programme should:

- 1) promote the development of peer mentoring and peer learning programs to ensure that mobile students are integrated into the host nation or institution;
- 2) promote the provision of convenient and reasonably priced facilities, such as housing, catering, and transportation for mobile students;
- 3) encourage the provision of guidance to students on the better use of learning mobility in order to develop their knowledge, skills and competences;
- 4) encourage the provision of guidance to mobile students upon their return, on how to use the competences acquired during their stay abroad;
- 5) provide assistance for the reintegration of mobile students after a long stay abroad (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2013).

These are consistent with proposals released by the European Commission and the Council of Europe highlighting priority areas for improving the quality of learning mobility. It is suggested, for example, that existing quality maps, such as the European Quality Charter for Mobility and national and regional maps, be leveraged to ensure high-quality mobility and improve quality assurance in all aspects of mobility. The Council also encourages ongoing dialogue and explicit arrangements between sending and receiving schools, such as the creation of learning agreements. Recognising the knowledge, skills, and competencies earned abroad is encouraged, as are clear selection methods, peer interchange, and structured support for students. To ensure quality, it is proposed that regular feedback mechanisms be

incorporated after the fact.

The differences in skill importance observed between this survey participants and the employers in the ErasmusJobs Survey (2021) are consistent with the findings of Mourshed et al. (2012), which involved 2,600 employers, 5,300 students, and 700 educational institutions in France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Germany, Italy, Portugal, Spain, and the United Kingdom, and concluded that one-third of European companies faced recruitment problems. In Greece, 45% of Greek firms reported issues due to a lack of skills among new labour market entrants. These findings are also consistent with a recent Greek study on the important soft skills required in the labour market conducted by Tsirkas et al. (2020), which discovered that workers' soft skills levels do not fulfil employers' expectations.

Given the existing gap in soft skills in the modern labour market in Greece and other European countries, it is noted that student mobility could potentially fill this gap in the future by helping HE students to develop their skills and thus contribute to their employability.

On the other hand, employers need to give regular input on the skills that university graduates need. Promoting employability and developing competencies is a one-way path for policymakers in higher education. This has caused universities to reassess their concerns about the employment of their graduates and the gaps between the competencies they acquired during their academic education and what businesses ultimately need (Urquía -Grande & Perez Estebanez, 2020).

To summarise, internationalisation of education is a significant strategy to boost graduates' employability. Erasmus is a flagship mobility program that reinforces the beneficial effects indicated above, which contribute to young people's academic and personal growth.

Limitations

Certain limitations of the research must be addressed. The first and most important of them is the representativeness of the sample, which influences the further findings' applications. Because the survey is being performed online, neither a representative nor a random sample can be chosen, raising the concern of self-selection bias. As a result, it is unknown to what extent the survey sample is typical of the population and whether the survey results may be extrapolated to the total population of Erasmus graduates in Greece. However, due to the COVID-19 outbreak that was sweeping through Greece, the survey had to be conducted online.

Online surveys are also inconvenient for reaching the entire residents. Only those with an internet connection and, in the case of this poll, access to social media were allowed to participate. For this study, the only persons who can use them are those who have access to social media and the internet. Those who do not have such access, in contrast to those who do, are not intentionally chosen to participate. This inherent bias in population coverage is a fundamental problem.

According to a study conducted by the Research and Analysis Agency (Demertzis et al., 2020), access to the internet and social networks is higher in the younger age groups (15-24, 25-34, and 35-44), compared to the older age groups (over 45), with the usage rate for 2019 being very similar (97.8% for 15-24 year old, 97.1% for 25-34 year old, and 93.1% for 35-44 year old). As a result, it is expected that this restriction had no effect on survey results.

Suggestions for Future Research

Because there are few relevant studies in Greek literature, there is a need to redo the study with more representative samples of the population of higher education graduates and Erasmus participants

in the future.

Furthermore, while the ErasmusJobs (2021) study is important for the European labour market, relevant research in Greece would be beneficial in order to better understand the needs of local employers and to more accurately compare the soft skills that prospective employees currently possess with those that they acquire through Erasmus participation.

Given Greece's recent high unemployment rates among young higher education graduates, more research into whether and to what extent this is true would be good.

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