

# Use of English in and out of the Classroom: Insights from Erasmus Students

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USE OF ENGLISH IN AND OUT OF THE CLASSROOM:  
INSIGHTS FROM ERASMUS STUDENTS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the M.A. in English Language and  
Literature and Art History

Supervisor: Asst. Prof. Irena Vodopija-Krstanović, Ph.D.

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## ABSTRACT

English has played a major role in today's society, due to the process of globalization and internationalization. It has become the language of academia and language of higher education. Due to its widespread and use, higher education institutions have started to organize courses in English to attract students worldwide. Erasmus, as the largest mobility programme, offers students to use English in academic and informal context.

The aim of this study is to show international students' opinion and use on their English development skills during Erasmus mobility programme. It investigates which context was more beneficial to their perceived language improvement, formal setting or informal setting. Results of this study imply that students perceive time spent during Erasmus mobility programme as linguistically valuable. The findings suggest that students depict out of classroom use of English more useful to their English improvement, than in-class experience. Small number of participants, uneven number of undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate students and students' accountability affect the overall findings of this study.

Further research is recommended to assess students' English proficiency and skill development before and after Erasmus mobility programme in and out of classroom in order to get insight into the English language development in non-English speaking countries during Erasmus.

**Keywords:** English language, Erasmus, development, language use, academic context, informal setting, international students

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

Studying abroad has been the topic of many research studies due to the multiple benefits students gain both personally and academically. Student mobility programmes offer students the ability to experience multiple cultures and languages, with Erasmus being at the forefront of creating stronger international cooperation between European universities (European Commission, 2017). The number of students who apply to Erasmus increases year by year and one of their main reasons for choosing certain university is the language of instruction (OECD, 2014). With English being the most dominant language of today's society, it is no surprise that it has a crucial role of being the instrument of socialization and education (Taguchi, 2014). Most of universities in Europe offer courses where English is the medium of instructions, including the University of Wroclaw in Poland.

The present study's objective is to inquire into international students' perceptions of English language development during the Erasmus mobility programme. These perceptions include the purposes of English use in formal setting and in informal setting. It also contains participants' expectation regarding the use of the English language while studying abroad, and the effect it has on their language improvement. This study is important because it shows the perceived use of English in different situations, which has not been the topic of many studies conducted so far.

What seems to be the problem in this research is the development of the English language skills in non-English speaking country, with the small number of the participants compared with the total number of international students at University of Wroclaw.

In order to show how Erasmus affected international students' use of English, students will be asked to fulfill an online questionnaire where they will provide their feedback on Erasmus experience by answering the combination of multiple choice and open-ended

questions. They will also state their agreement and disagreement on five-point Likert scale which will be evaluated and compared with the results of other similar findings.

The paper is organized in several chapters. Chapter two will present the notions of study abroad and student mobility, with the emphasis on language development as the main advantage. It will include the description of the student mobility benefits, as demonstrated in relevant literature. In this chapter, the concept of Erasmus mobility exchange will be introduced as the focus of the study. Chapter three describes the importance of the English language within student mobility providing the cause of internationalization and its role in higher education as medium of instruction. Erasmus programme will be discussed thoroughly in chapter four together with students' motifs of enrolling into the programme. Chapter five presents the current study with its aims and research questions. It is followed by describing participants of the University of Wroclaw in Poland. Subsequent to participants are the descriptions of research method and results, which are discussed in the chapter six. The final chapter of this paper consists of concluding remarks, limitations of the study, and further implications.

The question from this study arises; does Erasmus exchange programme have a beneficial role on the development of English among international students in non-speaking English environment? If it does, which context is more effective; academic setting or out of classroom experience?

## 2. STUDYING ABROAD AND STUDENT MOBILITY

Students have become aware of the fact that studying abroad will not only expand their knowledge, and open their mind, but will also grant them more employment opportunities (OECD, 2014). Due to the time spent studying in a foreign country, students become more independent, self-confident and more experienced in their field of study, and moreover they develop a greater sense of interculturality. (Coleman, 1998; Teichler, 2015; Pinar, 2016; Užpalienė & Vaičiūnienė, 2015).

By downsizing the rules and regulations of state lines and thus facilitating the mobility not only for personal purposes, but for academic needs as well, the intercommunication and collaboration between universities, governments, and companies has never been easier (Sigalas, 2010). As a result, the policy of the European Union centralizes traveling, living, working and studying in a foreign country, leading to a range of options such as greater chance of finding a job in a desired branch and acquiring foreign languages (Coleman, 1998; Sigalas, 2010). European Union policy strives to language diversity bringing the attention to better insight and apprehension of different cultures and pursuing the forward-looking mental outlook at all educational levels (Ersoy & Günel, 2011; European Commission, 2005).

Somewhat different from the term studying abroad is student mobility, which in return has several implications and varieties of its definition (Teichler, 2015). What studying abroad and student mobility both have in common is the difference in the learning and surrounding setting that students come from, and the learning and surrounding environment of their mobility (Teichler, 2015). Time duration of the mobility, i.e. time students spent abroad, is the main difference between these terms. To put it differently, study abroad is different from student mobility in the same way as temporary mobility is different from mobility of the whole degree programme (Teichler, 2015). Temporary mobility refers to the ability of extending their stay from two months to a full year at another university thus providing

students the opportunity to experience a variety of different universities within one's study period (Teichler, 2015). According to Macaro (2015), by 2020 the number of student mobility will come up to the number of seven million students that will probably result in the economical improvement of campuses and universities (Macaro, 2015). One of the largest and most prominent student mobility programme is Erasmus exchange programme (Souto-Otero, Huisman, Beerkens, de Wit, & Vujić, 2013), which will be the focus of this paper.

## 2.1. Benefits of studying abroad and language development

The time spent abroad is positively recognized not only by students, but also by university teachers, language assistants and everyone who is looking for a better chance to find a job (Coleman, 1998). This heterogeneous way of studying helps students gain valuable international experience which makes them more desirable on the labor market (Janson, Schomburg, & Teichler, 2009). The development of various skills such as critical thinking, better communication, successful adaptation to unknown situations, and awareness of different cultures acquired during their time spent studying abroad, makes them competitive and valuable future employees (Erasmus Facts, Figures and Trends, 2015; Teichler, 2015). Student mobility programmes grant students scholarships, eliminating the “money problem” and offering students even better conditions than they have back home (OECD, 2014). They also have one common feature, and that is to erase boundaries in higher education and to internationalize it (Souto-Otero, Huisman, Beerkens, de Wit, & Vujić, 2013).

A prerequisite of studying abroad is knowledge of at least two languages, thus most international students are at least bilingual, some even multilingual. Student mobility programmes promote multilingualism which refers to the ability of a person to be able to speak, think, study, teach, learn, write, read in or listen to more than one language (European



Commission, 2005). Students studying abroad find themselves in situations where they have to communicate in a language other than their mother tongue, being either the language of the country they are studying in, or any other mutual language of understanding, such as English. Situations, which involve reaching the agreement upon the language of communication, are described as multilingual (Hülmbauer, Böhringer, & Seidlhofer, 2008). That being the case, knowing more than one language has a huge impact on students' lives. It can only help them understand each other better and can make them more adaptive to new situations in a foreign country.

One of the central benefits of studying abroad is language development (Pinar, 2016). Research conclude that students who studied abroad had better results when it comes to foreign language skills, unlike those students who stayed at their home universities (Milton & Meara, 1995) What is more, students during the time spent abroad have to use the foreign language in and out of the classroom, thus practicing acquired language skills in everyday situations (Pinar, 2016). Additionally, students often take extra lessons in order to develop their skills in a foreign language, which are boosted with the alternating setting of formal and informal learning (Llanes & Serrano Serrano, 2011).

However, there is a contrast between language learned in formal setting and language used outside the classroom (Leonard & Shea, 2017). Formal setting is structured, with emphasis on the content, writing and reading skills, where informal usage of the language occurs outside the classroom in authentic life situations improving language speaking abilities (Bahrani, Shu Sim, & Nekoueizadeh, 2014). Many studies have been conducted concerning the benefits of studying abroad where immersion in the foreign society affects language acquisition and development (Pellegrino, 2015; Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsberg, 1990; Bryam, 1988; Freed, 1990). Similarly, certain studies have shown that pronunciation of foreign language progressed as a result of time spent abroad along with the vocabulary growth, which

goes in the favor of the beneficial role of studying in a foreign country (Pinar, 2016; Llanes & Serrano Serrano, 2011; Gürlek, 2016; Milton & Meara, 1995). Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsberg (1990) investigated the development of Russian language among US students during their time spent in Russia. The results showed that the majority of students claim that socializing with other Russians was more beneficial than learning in class (Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsberg, 1990). Furthermore, time spent in a foreign country has a positive effect on the speaking abilities mostly due to the frequency of conversation in a foreign language (Dewey, Belnap, & Hillstrom, 2013). Gillian Lord (2009) investigated written fluency and accuracy during time spent abroad in Spain, and her findings showed that written accuracy in foreign language improved within an academic year in the classroom setting (Lord, 2009). Likewise, oral fluency gain during study abroad is attributed to exposure of the foreign language which has a major significance in the improvement of speech production (Mora & Valls-Ferrer, 2012).

However, there are many factors which affect the acquisition and development of the foreign language, especially English due to its role as a global language (Crystal, 2003). Those factors include exposure to the foreign/English language, duration of the mobility, attitudes towards the English language, proficiency level of university teachers as well as international students and staff members, the number of subjects taught and available in English, and the language of the receiving and sending institution (OECD, 2014; Freed B., 1990). Students' individual differences, willingness to use the language in and out of classroom also impacts foreign language acquisition (Brecht & Robinson, 1995).

Students have to go through a period of adjustment from the surrounding of their studying to day-to-day life in the unknown, new situation and language of the country of their mobility (Teichler, 2015). Students are changing their communicative environment and practices, which affects their acquisition of a foreign language and general adjustment to the

chosen temporary place of habitat. Although it is claimed that the duration of the mobility affects language acquisition, further research is necessary to fully determine such claims (Llanes & Serrano Serrano, 2011).

### 3. ENGLISH LANGUAGE WITHIN STUDENT MOBILITY

The overgrowing popularity of English can be attributed to the mass media, technological development and the fact that it is the most powerful news medium. It is omnipresent in every aspect of everyday life; music, internet, business, economy, politics, and education (Coleman, 2006; Crystal, 2003). To fully understand the widespread use of the English language within student mobility programmes, it is necessary to mention the term globalization.

In the past few decades, globalization has changed the perception of the world around us. It has changed the way we think and communicate, and it has brought people worldwide closer together. It has had a huge impact not only on human relationships and economy, but also on the linguistic situation in the world (Coleman, 2006; Gürlek, 2016; Leinonen, 2014; Taguchi, 2014). To make communication easier and the interaction between cultures faster, the emergence of one common world language was essential (Crystal, 2003). The English language has progressively become the lingua franca and global language used by people all over the world (European Commission, 2011). The factors that defined English as the global language and lingua franca are the number of native and non-native speakers, its status in countries and the purpose of language use (Coleman, 2006; Leinonen, 2014). English as a lingua franca connects people who do not speak the same language and come from a different background (European Commission, 2011). In addition to this, English is used in science and technology, many papers, articles, and books are mostly written in English and therefore easily understood by scientists and researchers worldwide (Coleman, 2006). Moreover, globalization has affected education, where English has taken the role of the most learned language at all educational levels worldwide (Coleman, 2006).

That being the case, schools have introduced English as a part of their curricula all around the world, especially in Europe. It has been firstly introduced as a foreign language

which refers to the English language being learned in school as a compulsory subject in a non-speaking English environment (Marckwardt, 1963), and more recently as a medium of instructions (Crystal, 2003). It is not only present in primary and secondary school, but in higher education as well.

### 3.1. Internationalization and higher education

In the light of today's dominant role of English being the leading language of higher education, it is important to mention internationalization of higher education (Els van der Werf, 2012; Lasagabaster, Cots, & Mancho-Barés, 2013). Internationalization of higher education can be interpreted as the process of integration of nations and cultures on a global level with promoting mobility programmes, cooperation between universities, and introducing new ways of teaching and studying (Kerklaan, Moreira, & Boersma, 2008; Lasagabaster, Cots, & Mancho-Barés, 2013; Mauch & Spaulding, 1992). The aim is to form a partnership among universities worldwide in order to upgrade research, exchange ideas and information, make students more qualified in their own sector and to create a powerful connection at all levels, local, regional, institutional, and national in view of improving higher education (Mauch & Spaulding, 1992)

Apart from degree and credit mobility, which are involved in this process, there are also other forms of internationalization such as internationalization at home, internationalization of the syllabus and educational program, including internationalization of teaching, learning and learning outcomes (Els van der Werf, 2012). It has been present since the Middle Ages at the universities for the reason of expanding knowledge and academic education (Yang, 2002; Coleman, 2006). Internationalization, in the academic aspect, has also

been under the influence of globalization, creating an interdisciplinary approach which leads to personal, political, social, educational and cultural development (Yang, 2002).

Moreover, internationalization has been a big part of the linguistic domination of the English language and it has resulted in various language policies at European universities. David Lasagabaster, Josep M. Cots and Guzman Mancho-Barés (2013) mentioned three policies referring to the first one as the monolingual policy where the local language has been substituted in total with the English language, which is the case in Scandinavian countries (Lasagabaster, Cots, & Mancho-Barés, 2013). Bilingual policy is the second type of response to internationalization where universities provide courses both in local/national language and English, which is present in most universities providing student mobility programmes. The third policy is present in Catalonia where English is the third language together with regional and national language, and becoming the most salient language attracting not only students from all over Catalonia, but from other countries in Europe (Lasagabaster, Cots, & Mancho-Barés, 2013).

Several studies have displayed the preference towards the English language at universities, rather than the language of the host university (Kaypak & Ortaçtepe, 2014). Gürlek (2016) explains the process of how English has become an inseparable part of everyday life in Turkey mostly due to the Turkey's important position and location in the world, which is the reason why it is being taught from an early age (Gürlek, 2016). In Finland, English has an important role in personal and business life, and almost every person speaks English fluently thanks to the fact that they started introducing the English language in school in the 1960s (Leinonen, 2014).

Coleman (2006), asserted that connection English has with internationalization is by no means most expressed in countries where English is not the mother tongue. In those cases, the problem occurs in the degree of the English language inclusion in certain programmes at

universities. However shift from the local language of the university to the English language, is rarely possible without difficulties.

### 3.2. English as medium of instruction at higher education institutions

One of the goals of using the English language in education as a medium of instruction is to improve student's English proficiency in academic context by teaching subjects and courses using English (Taguchi, 2014). Therefore, English is not viewed as a subject on its own but as a tool of academic learning and teaching. One of the many objectives that EMI fosters is to encourage students to take part in exchange programmes (Kerklaan, Moreira, & Boersma, 2008). The benefit of EMI is that it promotes internationalization of knowledge among universities by developing a new way of learning and teaching based on mutual collaboration and developing strategies in order to accomplish predetermined learning and teaching outcomes (Han & Singh, 2014). It is important to realize that EMI is developing into a leading agent in turning universities into highly educational institution and raising their profile on a global scale (Macaro, 2015).

It is essential to offer courses in English as a result of internationalization and globalization that universities all over Europe have undergone. Being the lingua franca and the language of higher education (Lasagabaster, Cots, & Mancho-Barés, 2013), universities progressively open numerous courses in English in order to attract more international students, and to prepare their own students for the job market (Souto-Otero, Huisman, Beerkens, de Wit, & Vujić, 2013). Most of the courses and programmes are offered to graduates, notably in the fields of engineering, management, business and social sciences, followed by technology, natural sciences, humanities and art. (Lasagabaster, Cots, & Mancho-Barés, 2013; Brenn-White and Faethe).

However, institutionalization of EMI is not a simple process in non-English speaking countries. Universities are required to have specific policies which refer to the high-specialized courses adapted to be taught in English, and the very organization and effort of university management to enable the necessary changes in order to implement EMI in their program and curricula (Han & Singh, 2014).

Teaching staff have little or no assistance from their own universities, and instead of being prepared and trained to adjust their course and teach it in English, universities are offering programmes that are entirely in English without adapting to it beforehand (Lasagabaster, Cots, & Mancho-Barés, 2013). Although this is not the case at every university, it is evident in some higher education institutions in Portugal (Kerklaan, Moreira, & Boersma, 2008), Taiwan (Han & Singh, 2014), and Turkey (Gürlek, 2016). By contrast, in countries such as Sweden, Finland, Germany and Netherlands, the implementation of English has been quite effortless (Lasagabaster, Cots, & Mancho-Barés, 2013). That is mostly because of the sociolinguistic situation, which refers to the occurrence and use of the English language in education, media, business, technology, news and everyday life (Lasagabaster, Cots, & Mancho-Barés, 2013).

One of the key problems is that those university teachers, who do not have the necessary knowledge, resources, and proficiency in the language they have to teach, find it quite hard to transfer the course material effectively (Cotz, Lasagabaster, & Garret, 2012; Kerklaan, Moreira, & Boersma, 2008). Consequently, the quality of programmes comes to the question together with the students' comprehension of the course material (Lasagabaster, Cots, & Mancho-Barés, 2013). What is more, there is a large distinction between general English for everyday purposes often learned in secondary schools, and academic English which is necessary for effective studying in English. (Cummins, 2008). Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) refers to the language use for social purposes, whereas



Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) refers to oral and written literacy of academic language (Cummins, 2008). CALP is important in EMI and studying abroad because students have to be proficient enough not only in academic discourse, but to be able to successfully master the course material being held in English (Cummins, 2008). The distinction of these terms should be the benchmark in higher education.

## 4. ERASMUS+

Since 1987, Erasmus programme is known to be one of the most important and biggest outstanding mobility programmes for students (Sigalas, 2010; Souto-Otero, Huisman, Beerkens, de Wit, & Vujić, 2013). Providing scholarships which help students with the costs concerning study life and additional personal expenses, it gives the opportunity for each student to experience the feeling of studying abroad (Teichler, 2015). Moreover, Erasmus supports students with intensive language program and foreign language courses provided in the language of the Erasmus mobility country. It also offers guidance of how to study and live in a foreign country providing support when it comes to accommodation, transport, study programme of the host university, arrival and departure matters (Coleman, 1998). It aims at promoting education, work, travel and internationalization that is based on the cooperation between European universities which are in agreement to receive/send students and/or teaching staff (Krzaklewska and Krupnik, 2008). Erasmus is designated to expand the borders of education outside the European Union, to make teaching and learning easier, successful, qualitative, and accessible to people worldwide (European Commission, 2001).

The exchange is possible at each level of study; Bachelor, Master or Doctoral (known as temporary student mobility), as well as mobility within certain departments and institutions, and organized study abroad which can be intra-European and/or international (Bracht, Engel, Janson, Over, Schomburg, & Teichler, 2006). The Bologna Process grants students greater mobility by recognizing degree structure along with the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) (European Higher Education Area and Bologna Process, 2015). One of the main goals of EHEA's approach is sharing the common objective of culturally, politically and academically different countries in order to increase student-centered learning (European Higher Education Area and Bologna Process, 2015).

Thirty-three countries participated in the Erasmus, including countries which are not members of the European Union such as Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey and Macedonia. According to the latest facts and figures, in 2014, over 272 000 students and 57 000 staff engaged in Erasmus mobility programme abroad (Erasmus Facts, Figures and Trends, 2015), which increased by eleven percent in 2015 with the total of 678,000 students participating in Erasmus (European Commission, 2017).

There are a myriad of reasons why students apply for Erasmus, foreign language development is definitely on the top of the list (Užpalienė & Vaičiūnienė, 2015). When it comes to the choice of university, one takes into account living cost, offer of subjects and quality of the receiving university, future perspectives, receiving administration, culture and language of the host institution (Janson, Schomburg, & Teichler, 2009). Erasmus illustrates the importance of diverse linguistic situation at higher education institutions by encouraging multilingualism in the way that gives each and every student a chance to study a foreign language regardless of their nationality and background (Užpalienė & Vaičiūnienė, 2015). What is more, language is the key factor that dictates the choice of university and country of mobility (Pineda, Morena, & Belvis, 2008). Students tend to choose universities where the languages of instruction are known worldwide. Those languages are mostly Spanish, Russian, French, German, and of course the most dominant one, English (OECD, 2004; Teichler, 1996). As a consequence, more and more countries are trying to offer as many subjects and study programs in English in order to lure the best students to their university.

## 5. PRESENT STUDY

### 5.1. Aims and research questions

The broader aim of this study is to investigate Erasmus students' perceptions on their language development and use of English during the studying abroad period on the Erasmus exchange programme. It examines how and in which situations students use English in a formal instructional settings, that is the classroom, and informal settings in their day-to-day life. Specifically, the study aims to examine whether the students perceived their use of English in or out of the classroom beneficial to their language improvement.

The main research question is:

How does Erasmus affect students use and development of English?

This is followed by several sub-questions:

- 1) For what purpose do students use English outside the classroom?
- 2) For what purpose do students use English in the classroom?
- 3) How frequent do students use reading, writing and speaking in English outside the classroom?
- 4) How frequent do students use reading, writing and speaking in English in the classroom?
- 5) Which language skills have students develop through the use of English outside the classroom?
- 6) Which language skills have students develop through the use of English in the classroom?
- 7) What effect has the study abroad had on their perceived language development?

## 5.2. Participants and context

The sample of this study consists of fifty three international students who participated in the Erasmus+ mobility programme at the University of Wroclaw in Poland which comprises of 42 000 students offering courses in English at Bachelor's and Master's level of study. Research participants are students from Belgium, Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, Turkey, Mexico, Serbia, and Slovenia. Their age spans from nineteen to thirty. Their study programmes are diverse, where the greatest number of participants (30.1%) study in the field of international relations, while others take courses in civil engineering, Croatian and Serbian language and literature, English philology, law, political science, philosophy, Polish language and literature, geology, maritime studies, journalism, tourism management, and history.

The majority of participants (60.4%) are at the Bachelor's level of study, 32.1% are at the Master's level, and only 7.5% are postgraduates. Out of fifty three participants, 83% studied in Wroclaw for one semester, 15% for the whole academic year, and only one student stayed for two months.

The students were mainly exposed to English as the language of instructions for one or two semesters, with the exception of philology major students who attended classes held in Polish and Serbian.

As for the students' level of English competence, they rated it quite high; most of them (43.4%) stated C1 as their proficiency level of English, 20.8% stated C2, as 20.8% rated B2, while only 11.3% stating B1 proficiency level. Only two students marked A2 as their proficiency level, while none of the participants listed A1 level as their English language competence. At the time of the data collection, forty eight students had studied English for a minimum of eight years, while the rest had studied for less than five years.

### 5.3 Research method

Intended data of this research were collected by means of an online questionnaire written in English, which were distributed via social media and e-mail. It was sent to 97 international students who participated in Erasmus exchange programme in at the University of Wroclaw and it yielded a response rate of 55%. The data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics in SPSS program and Excel program.

The questionnaire comprised of seventy two questions divided into three parts. The first part of the survey enquired into demographics of the participants which consisted of eight short answer questions and five multiple choice questions regarding their age, country of the receiving and sending institution, level of study, study programme, and their knowledge and use of the English language prior to the exchange programme. They were asked to rate their English proficiency level and state how many years they had studied English. Other questions elicited their use of English before Erasmus and included questions about the language of instruction at the receiving institution and whether they took additional language courses in English at their sending institution. They were also asked to state their opinion if their high school knowledge of English was enough to prepare them for studying in English. Additional questions were related to the information about whether they are fluent in the language of the country of their mobility and which languages they used most outside the classroom.

In the second part, participants were asked to rate each statement on a five-item Likert-type scale that included thirty-six questions. For every statement, participants indicated whether they strongly agreed, agreed, neither agreed nor disagreed, disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statements which referred to the use of English in and out of the classroom, the improvement they made in speaking, writing, listening, and reading in English during the mobility programme. They also had to express their agreement with their pronunciation and

vocabulary use in formal and informal settings, along with statements which provide insight into students' opinion on the effect university teachers had on their language development.

The third part investigated how many hours per week they spent writing, reading, and speaking in English for academic purposes. In addition, out of the classroom in view of six multiple choice questions. In form of two open ended, the participants had to explain for what purpose they listened to English in and out of the classroom. This is followed by twelve open ended questions eliciting information on the participants' use of English in and out of the classroom at their home and host universities. They also had to describe the challenges they faced when studying in English at the host institution and using it outside the classroom. Furthermore, they were asked to state in which situations they used English the most, what aspect of English they had improved the most and in which setting, along with their opinion of how they could have better developed their knowledge and skills in English more.

Finally, a textbox was provided if participants had any additional comments.

## 6. RESULTS

The findings concerning participants' previous knowledge of English language gained in high school indicate that nearly half of the students (49%) believe it to be sufficient while it is deemed to be insufficient by a slightly larger number of them (51%). When asked to provide the reasons why it was not sufficient, students' responses were mainly that

*“It was not good enough for communication”* (5) and

*“I think that the quality of the English classes in primary school and high-school is very low and not sufficient enough for speaking English fluently or even understand English native speakers”* (2),

*“More than 4 years of high school are needed to understand complex terms and to gain vocabulary rich enough to comprehend.”* (3).

There are not as many arguments in the favor of the English language learning in high school being sufficient for studying in English, some of the examples are:

*“I think that the English I learned in high-school is good enough a least for basic studying in English at least for beginning until you don't get used on learning in non-mother language”* (1)

*“Well, it depends of the competences of the students, as for me it was more than ok”* (2)

Most students (84.9%) state that they did not take additional English language courses in order to be prepared for studying in English due to the fact that they had not been offered such courses at their own university. Another reason is their high English proficiency level, and to some English is an obligatory course at their sending institution. In response to the question if they speak the language of the host country where they are studying, 56% of the participants are not fluent, 19% of them are, and the rest answered they speak a bit of the language or they started to learn it there. As most of the participants are not fluent and do not speak the language of the host country, all of them list English as the language they use



outside of the classroom, among other languages. Only 19% percent of the students do not have English as the language of instruction of the courses at the receiving Erasmus institution, due to the fact that they study Polish language and literature and Serbian language and literature. The remaining percentage (81%) of the participants takes a minimum of five EMI courses per week.

The participants' main reason for choosing to participate in Erasmus programme is to use English in day-to-day life outside the academic setting. To be more precise, 28.3% of them somewhat agree with this claim, while 34% of them strongly agree which makes them the vast majority. The main reasons for applying for Erasmus are shown in Table 1. The data are showed through expected value (mean) ranging from minimum, which stands for *strongly disagree*, to maximum, meaning *strongly agree*. The standard deviation column stands for the measure of variation of participants' responses. The lower the number of standard deviation, the closer the number is to the mean.

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
One of the main reasons I applied for Erasmus was to improve my English language skills.	53	1	5	3,17	1,312
One of the main reasons I applied for Erasmus was to study in English.	53	1	5	2,77	1,368
One of the main reasons I applied for Erasmus was to be able to use English in real-life everyday situations.	53	1	5	3,60	1,364

Table 1. Reasons for Erasmus appliance

The majority (56.6%) states that they use English mainly outside the classroom (M=4,17; SD=1,156). They also state they use English in formal setting with the similar response rate of agreement, which is 58.5% (M=4,06; SD=1,379).

To the question if their English improved due to the courses they take in English eleven participants (21%) state they strongly disagree, as well as eleven of them (21%) are neither for or against this statement (M=2,96; SD=1,358). In contrast, 43.4% completely agree and 28.3% agree with the statement that the development of their English is due to the time spent speaking the language in informal setting (M=3,98; SD=1,358)

In terms of students' language skills development in the classroom, the general overview is that students do not attribute language improvement to the formal setting, as presented in Table 2. However, when it comes to the same questions in informal setting, the majority of students (54.33%) ascribe language skills development to everyday situations, rather than studying and learning in classroom situations. (Table 3)

**Descriptive Statistics**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I improved my listening skills in English in the classroom.	53	1	5	3,47	1,527
I improved my speaking skills in English in the classroom.	53	1	5	3,15	1,392
I improved my English reading skills through classroom reading assignments.	53	1	5	3,34	1,413
I improved my writing skills in English writing papers for classes.	53	1	5	3,43	1,461
I improved my pronunciation in English in the classroom.	53	1	5	2,98	1,434
I improved my vocabulary in English in the classroom.	53	1	5	3,57	1,366

Table 2. English language skills development in the classroom

**Descriptive Statistics**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I improved my listening skills in English outside the classroom.	53	1	5	3,87	1,194
I improved my speaking skills in English outside the classroom.	53	1	5	4,00	1,193
I improved my English reading skills outside the classroom.	53	1	5	3,25	1,254
I improved my writing skills in English outside the classroom.	53	1	5	3,08	1,398
I improved my pronunciation in English outside the classroom.	53	1	5	3,74	1,332
I improved my vocabulary in English outside the classroom	53	1	5	3,96	1,091

Table 3. English language skills development outside the classroom

This section of data shows the difference between the results in and out of classroom regarding intensive use of English, along with the reasons of overall contribution to their language development and feeling of self-confidence. (Table4)

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I used English intensively in various settings.	53	1	5	4,13	1,127
I used English intensively for studying and academic purposes.	53	1	5	3,81	1,272
I feel more secure in expressing myself in English after my Erasmus mobility because I studied in English.	53	1	5	3,66	1,329
I feel more secure to express myself in English after my Erasmus mobility because I used English in real-life situations.	53	1	5	4,17	1,087
Attending social activities and meeting new people significantly contributed to my language development.	53	1	5	4,38	,790
Attending classes in English has significantly contributed to my language development.	53	1	5	3,60	1,335

Table 4. General usage and English language development in and out of the classroom

Most of them (68%) made an effort to learn the local language, while the need to learn it is slightly differently expressed; 18,8% strongly disagree, 22,6% disagree, 15% neither agree nor disagree, 34% agree, and 5% strongly agree.

As for the role of university teachers in language development, the majority of the participants (79.2%) think that university teachers should provide good language input. However, the response rate of whether students would benefit from university teachers being native speakers of English is quite equally distributed. (see Table 5)

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
University teachers encouraged me to participate more in class interaction.	53	1	5	3,25	1,108
University teachers should provide good language input.	53	3	5	4,09	0,714
University teachers of subject courses should provide feedback on students' English.	53	1	5	3,40	1,062
I would learn English better if the university teachers were native speakers of English.	53	1	5	3,49	1,203

Table 5. Attitudes towards university teachers' English language proficiency

When asked in which setting they master English more, 13.2% completely disagree that English is best learned in the formal classroom setting at the host institution, 30.1% disagree, 28.3% neither agree nor disagree, 18.9% agree, and 9.4% completely agree. The

question regarding English being learned best outside the classroom, yields different responses; 1.9% strongly disagree, 5,7% disagree, 26,4% neither agree nor disagree, 39.6% agree, and 26.4% strongly agree.

Their opinion on the statement: *English is a lingua franca, and it is only important to get the message across in real-life situations, rather than be accurate in the language*, is mainly rated as neutral, with majority of participants (42.2%) stating they neither agree nor disagree (M=2.89; SD=0.974). Concerning the statement: *English is a lingua franca, and it is only important to get the message across in real-life situations, rather than be accurate in the language*, students' response is slightly in the favor of being rated as affirmative (M=3.17; SD=1.051).

When it comes how frequently they use English in the classroom, students most frequently spend writing, speaking and reading in English two or less hours per week for academic purposes. Table 6 shows how frequently the respondents use English in various time slots in the formal setting.

	0-2 hours per week	3-5 hours per week	6-8 hours per week	9 and more hours per week
<b>Writing</b>	34% of the participants	24.5% of the participants	15.1% of the participants	26.4% of the participants
<b>Reading</b>	45.3% of the participants	34% of the participants	13.2% of the participants	7.5% of the participants
<b>Speaking</b>	39.6% of the participants	24.5% of the participants	17% of the participants	18.9% of the participants

Table 6. Formal setting English use in writing, listening and speaking

Compared to the use of English language in their day-to-day life outside of the classroom, findings show that 75.5% of the participants utter they speak in English for more than nine hours per week outside of the classroom (see Table 7). Accordingly, as for whether they are exposed frequently to English outside the classroom, 94.3% state that they agree with this statement (M=4,36; ST=0,710).

	0-2 hours per week	3-5 hours per week	6-8 hours per week	9 and more hours per week
<b>Writing</b>	34% of the participants	30.2% of the participants	9.4% of the participants	26.4% of the participants
<b>Reading</b>	30.2% of the participants	37.7% of the participants	17% of the participants	15.1% of the participants
<b>Speaking</b>	7.5% of the participants	9.4% of the participants	7.5% of the participants	75.5% of the participants

Table 7. Informal setting English use in writing, reading and speaking

As for listening skill in English language, students are asked to elicit the reasons for listening to English language in and out of classroom.

The most frequent reasons for listening to English language in the classroom are:

*“To follow the course and to learn in class”* (32)

*“For knowledge gaining and language improvement.”* (2)

*“It was only possibility, I didn't know Polish so good that I can intend the lectures in Polish.”*

(1)

Conversely, students listen to English outside the classroom for variety of purposes, mostly *“social purposes”* (10), *“listening to music”* (3), *“movies”* (5), *“personal research and development”* (1), *“to practice listening”* (2).



The overwhelming majority (94.3%) agree with the statement that they benefited from the time spent during their Erasmus mobility because it improves their language development. Students point out that it is because they have to speak English because they do not know Polish language and they are more confident using English in a conversation.

*“I learned how to use some chemistry phrases to explain reaction, how to discuss about issues during the reaction, so in the end I was able to understand everything and to speak and discuss without any problem” (1)*

*“Because I was using it a lot more than I do at home, I have improved my vocabulary, I think I speak it more fluently now, I have gained confidence when it comes to speaking in English.” (2)*

Moreover, they claim that some specific courses with specific vocabulary and daily communication in English help them most to improve their language proficiency.

*“The need to communicate even when I didn't know how to say something” (1)*

*“My friends mostly, I had a good time trying to copy the best English habits of my friends, if they were speaking with a great accent I really tried to do the same as them while I was talking to them. Also while I was speaking, when I realized there was a word I didn't know, I tried to find it after and to remember it.” (1)*

However, speaking in English and communicating with other people is the most frequent answer regarding language development.

*“Recurring grammar mistakes that both us students and sometimes teachers were making contributed least to expanding my vocabulary” (2)*

*“Speaking English together with students who often made mistakes, because then I started speaking bad as well sometimes.” (3)*

*“Having to use simpler English in order to be understood when interacting with people who weren't very proficient didn't help to develop my English.”*

As already mentioned, some students use English at their home university because they have obligatory courses in English, along with English foreign language course and courses English for specific purposes. However, a larger number of them (56.6%) do not use English in the formal setting in their sending institution. With regard to use of English outside the classroom, the majority of students (64.2%) claim that they use English outside of the classroom for the purposes of watching movies, listening to music, talking with Erasmus students at their home university, communicating with foreigners, and some state they use English because of their summer job.

When asked what challenges they face when using English outside the classroom, most of them explain that lack of vocabulary is one of the greatest obstacles, accompanied by absence of self-confidence and trouble when translating from one's mother tongue.

*“On the one hand, when speaking to English native speakers I struggled a lot to understand them (for example a guy from Nottingham and some guys from US. On the other hand, when I had to speak English with people who had a very low level, I had to make a huge effort to understand them or try to guess what they wanted to express (for instance, most of the people from Turkey).” (1)*

Vocabulary is identified as the main difficulty in using English in everyday situations, however, grammatical accuracy and university teachers' inadequate language proficiency are the most frequent challenges related to the use of English in the courses or for studying purposes. Vocabulary is also listed as one of the problems while studying due to difficulty of understanding complex specialist terms. Although the majority does not believe that they have improved their English as a result of studying in the language English language in the classroom, grammar and vocabulary in terms of specific terminology, are the common aspects of English language which students state as an example of language development. The minority of students (18.8%) list pronunciation, and reading and writing, whereas speaking

and listening are mentioned when asked which aspect of English they improve outside the classroom. 20.7% of the participants also indicate that vocabulary is enriched through communication with people from all over the world, while the improvement of grammar is mentioned by just one student.

Interaction in class is identified as the best way to improve English in the formal setting, with of student listing reasons such as: “*write more, being confronted with oral assessments, more language tips given by teachers*” (3), “*the combination of grammar learning with conversation*” (2), and “*native speaking teachers or better English speakers*” (8). Interaction is also mentioned in terms of improvement outside the classroom, not only speaking with Erasmus students, but also with native speakers of English. They also list reading books, and watching movies with English subtitles.

## 7. DISCUSSION

Overall findings of this research suggest that time spent during Erasmus exchange programme has a positive impact on students use and development of the English language. Similarly, previous studies showed that immersion in the foreign society boosts language development (Gürlek, 2016). Erasmus provides students with the chance to be exposed to the English language, far more than at their home university, thus creating an ideal opportunity to accelerate English language speaking skills (Leonard & Shea, 2017). However, difference between language uses in and out of classroom is dependent on the context and needs of the situation in which one finds itself (European Commission, 2011). Results of this study suggest that out of classroom situations during Erasmus mobility programme were perceived as more beneficial for English language improvement among international students.

One of the benefits of studying abroad is to study in a foreign language with the purpose of language development, yet these students claim it is not their main purpose of taking part in the Erasmus experience. Surprisingly, they list that using English in real-life situations is one of the main reasons of their Erasmus enrollment. This is paradoxical considering the fact that large number of them does not speak Polish, which is the language of the country of their mobility. On the other hand, Polish people do not speak English that well, resulting in students' greater use of English with other international students and professors. That is also the case at their home university, where they use English mainly with other Erasmus students. It is questionable whether students can gain greater experience in the English language solely by talking to the local Polish people (Kaypak & Ortaçtepe, 2014). Correspondingly, in this study, the lack of fluency in Polish, along with insufficient English knowledge of the locals, compel students to use English only among themselves.

Nonetheless, students usually spend most of their time with other international students, and not so much with the locals, resulting in greater use of English, which in their opinion contributes to greater language development. Speaking and communicating with other people is what helps students the most when it comes to improving their English proficiency. Other studies have also demonstrated that speaking was one of the best ways of language development (Dewey, Belnap, & Hillstrom, 2013; Badstübner & Ecke, 2009; The Council of Europe, 2001; Teichler & Maiworm, 1997). Socialization and communication contributes to the extended use of English resulting in greater oral fluency (Mora & Valls-Ferrer, 2012).

Interestingly, the participants also indicated that speaking was sometimes the reason why they could not benefit as much as they wanted to while communicating with other people. They are concerned about the other students' level of English proficiency and that they have to accommodate to the speaker resulting in lack of progress in English. What contributes more to this, are students who tend to associate themselves with the people who speak their native language, meaning that they do not use English as a language of mutual understanding (Freed, Segalowitz, & Dewey, 2004).

However, even though participants are faced with problems while speaking (fluency, correct use of grammar, pronunciation), communicating in English improved their sense of security and enhanced their fluency. This is what is typical for Erasmus mobility, the situations where students do not understand each other, but do not give up, they try to find a way to communicate, and simultaneously, without being aware, improve their language skills (Kalocsai, 2009; Leonard & Shea, 2017). International students become a part of the socialization process in which they achieve linguistic development during study abroad, where language becomes "both the means and the goal of the socialization process" (Kalocsai, 2009).

Students also believe that they develop their vocabulary more by using it outside the classroom than in class. This was also corroborated by other studies, where students acquire new words without being aware they enrich their vocabulary (Ife, Boix, & Meara, 2000; Milton & Meara, 1995). Students believed that vocabulary learned in the classroom is also one of the reasons of language improvement, when it comes to specific terminology closely tied to their field of study. This is not surprising as vocabulary does improve the most in communication with other people, along with reading books, magazines or other academic related papers (Dewey, Belnap, & Hillstrom, 2013; Milton & Meara, 1995). Writing also enhances vocabulary development and oral fluency as well, which participants of this study confirmed stating that assignments they had to write for academic purposes really helped them to learn and master the needed vocabulary (Dewey, Belnap, & Hillstrom, 2013). However, it should be born in mind that the vocabulary used in and out of class probably differs, i.e. general everyday words as opposed to specialist terminology.

Although classroom language use should be the foundation of language improvement as a result of studying abroad in unknown surrounding (Leonard & Shea, 2017), participants maintain that language use in classroom is not good enough for them to prosper from it, due to university teachers' English language competence, as well as their own. Paradoxically, when asked what could have been done in order to improve their English language in the classroom, most of them list participation in class, meaning that they were aware of the fact that it might have been their own fault they did not progress from language use in classroom. This could be due to the fact that students' willingness to participate in class depends not only on their language abilities, but also on their personality, fear of public speaking and anxiety when expressing their thoughts in a foreign language.

Most students were not offered foreign language courses, let alone courses where English language is the medium of instruction. Specifically, students were not offered content

courses in English and no preparatory courses in academic English. What is surprising, is the fact that even though most of the participants were not provided with courses in English, they did not take additional courses in English to prepare themselves for the minimum of five courses per week where English is the medium of instruction. Some participants think that English they have learned in high school was not sufficient for studying in English abroad at the receiving Erasmus institution. On the other hand, some of them explain that they have learned English for years, and that to some, high school knowledge of English can be enough because it varies on their proficiency level.

Regarding university teachers' language proficiency in English and their general effect on students' language development, the participants generally agree that it is crucial to them to have good language input. The reason why participants of this study state that they prefer native speakers as their university teachers could be attributed to the low English proficiency level of university teachers. This case is also present among a large number of Turkish universities, where because of insufficient knowledge of English among university professors resulted in difficulties of Erasmus implementation (Burçer, 2015). Students' perception is that the aforementioned English competence level of university teachers greatly affects the development of English language among international students, thus staff members should be trained to be able to teach their courses in English (Turkish Students, Isolation and the Erasmus Challenge, 2014).

Many studies have shown that students repeatedly distinguish their academic language use as inefficient, as opposed to language used while communicating with other international students outside the classroom (Pellegrino, 2015; Fraser, 2002). Likewise, the students in this study share the same opinion, stating that informal setting is more beneficial to their language improvement.

## 8. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The general opinion is that Erasmus mobility programme is linguistically and professionally valuable (Coleman, 1998; Gürlek, 2016; Teichler, 2015; Zhelyazkova, 2013; Taguchi, 2014). However, not many studies have been conducted concerning the differences of the English language development in formal setting and out of the classroom during Erasmus mobility programme in a country where English is not a native language. Additionally, what distinguishes this study and findings from previous research is that it showed that international students believe that their English improved through socialization as well as the medium of knowledge transfer in the classroom. Both contexts are deemed to be equally beneficial, however students of this study claim that out of classroom experience contributed more to their English development. They state that communication with other students is what helped them most to their language improvement. However findings suggest that they rarely used English speaking skills in formal settings, which explains their opinion why classroom surrounding was not as beneficial to them, as outdoor experience. According to students, writing and reading are perceived skills which develop in formal setting, while speaking and listening progress in informal setting. Students identify the occurrence of vocabulary expansion in both contexts, yet in different fields. Meaning that, students believe to broaden their vocabulary in real-life situations, whereas in formal setting, students acquired new words of the specific terminology.

The findings of this research could be beneficial to every international student willing to apply on Erasmus programme, with the purpose of raising awareness of the potential possibilities for language improvement during mobility exchange, along with personal and professional growth.

Nevertheless, there are some limitations to this study such as a small number of participants, considering the fact that there are numerous international students participating



in Erasmus programme. The uneven number of undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate students can also result in different attitudes and language development bearing in mind that some courses demand a greater English proficiency level. The fact that some of the participants are philology majors in Polish and Serbian also had an impact on the results and answers because of the lack of subjects in English language. Unwillingness to participate in classroom activities and participants' accountability contributed in forming the overall opinion that the time students spend in class is considered invaluable to the participants. It is hard to say which context is more beneficial for language improvement, being that the present study shows students' perceptions on their language development. Students were not tested before and after their mobility, hence their language improvement cannot be officially proven. It should also be borne in mind that students were faced with language obstacles in Wroclaw, such as not enough exposure to English as a result of insufficient knowledge of English among Polish people.

The findings of this study imply that there are some measures that have to be taken in order to diminish grouping of students based on their native language and reduce lack of English academic proficiency among international students. Greater internationalization among students should be encouraged. English language competence should be taken into account when applying for Erasmus. Not only should students take language tests before the mobility, but they should also prepare themselves by taking courses in English for academic purposes.

The current research has opened many questions regarding English use in and out of the classroom in non-native English surrounding, where students imply that out of classroom experience is more beneficial than formal setting. Not many studies showed students' perception on this topic, therefore the findings of this study can contribute to further research

in English language development during Erasmus in countries where English is not a native language.

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