



LISBON  
SCHOOL OF  
ECONOMICS &  
MANAGEMENT  
UNIVERSIDADE DE LISBOA

**MESTRADO**

**GESTÃO DE RECURSOS HUMANOS**

**TRABALHO FINAL DE MESTRADO**

**DISSERTAÇÃO**

**ERASMUS EXPERIENCE: THE IMPACT ON  
EMPLOYABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT OF  
SKILLS**

**HENRIQUE MANUEL RIBEIRO FIADEIRO**

**OUTUBRO - 2017**



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**ORIENTAÇÃO:**

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## Resumo

O programa Erasmus é um programa de mobilidade entre estudantes de diferentes países que tem aumentado a cada ano. Este programa proporciona aos estudantes intercâmbios em países diferentes que lhes proporcionam uma experiência diferente tanto ao nível pessoal como profissional. Esta dissertação tem como objetivo analisar algumas das vantagens deste programa, nomeadamente ao nível da aprendizagem e enriquecimento de competências e o impacto que o programa pode ter ao nível da empregabilidade relativamente aos estudantes que o experienciaram. Para a elaboração desta dissertação, foi usado como amostra um grupo de 118 estudantes que tiveram uma experiência Erasmus em países diversos. Este grupo foi submetido a um questionário que procura analisar as perceções que os mesmos têm ao nível do seu desenvolvimento de determinadas competências e ao nível das perspetivas de empregabilidade antes e após o intercâmbio. Os Resultados permitem-nos concluir que uma experiência Erasmus provoca nos estudantes um impacto positivo relativamente à perceção no desenvolvimento de competências e perspetiva de empregabilidade no seu futuro, sendo estes os tópicos desenvolvidos em detalhe nesta dissertação.

Palavras-chave: Estudantes, Empregabilidade, Competências, Programa Erasmus



### **Abstract**

The Erasmus Programme is a mobility programme between students from different countries that is increasing year by year. This Programme gives the students exchange experiences abroad which allows them to have a different personal and professional experience. This dissertation has the goal of analysing some of the advantages of these exchanges, especially regarding the improvement of competences and the impact on their future employability. Regarding the literature review and the facts already discovered, we used a sample of 118 students who already did Erasmus. This group of students filled a questionnaire which had as its main goal, to analyse the perceptions they have regarding the development of competences and perspectives of employability before and after their exchange. The results allow us to conclude that an Erasmus experience has a positive impact on the students, regarding the perception they have about the development of competences and perspectives of employability in their future, and these are the topics analysed during this dissertation.

**Key words:** Students, Employability, Competences, Erasmus Programme



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## 1. Introduction

The Erasmus Program, probably the most famous European Program, was established in 1987. With this program students can study abroad for up to 12 months per each cycle of tertiary education. According to the Eurostat database of November 2016, "around 1.48 million people undertaking tertiary level studies in EU Member States in 2014 came from abroad". In 2014, this program was superseded by the EU's program for education, training, youth and sport, referred to as 'Erasmus+'. In the field of higher education, Erasmus+ gives students and staff opportunities to develop their skills and boost their employment prospects (Eurostat, 2016).

The Erasmus program bring us to the phenomenon of globalization which covers the world and in particular the countries of the European Union, given how easy it has become to travel between the country members of the European Union. Associated with this phenomenon, contributed the famous Bologna Process in 1999, which, gave European students facilities to study abroad.

Lisbon has recently become one of the most famous destinations for Erasmus. A study made by the Municipality of Lisbon shows that Lisbon had an increase of Erasmus students from 2,133 in 2007 to 3,130 in 2010, and an increase of 30% incoming students

from 2004 to 2012. Therefore, in 2012/2013 Lisbon had almost 14,000 foreign students (the Erasmus Students plus the students who came by the adoption of additional protocols) which is significant for a total of 139,800 higher education Portuguese students in the same year (Câmara de Lisboa 2014).

This huge increase of incoming students from abroad in Lisbon sparked our interest to understand how an Erasmus Exchange can affect the future life of the students. In particular, we would like to analyse whether an experience like this could be related with the improvement of personal/professional skills and to understand if it can have a connection with the employability once the Erasmus is finished.

Thus, this research has four major objectives:

- Analyse the perception Erasmus students have about the development of their skills.
- Analyse the perception that the Erasmus Students have about their employability after Erasmus.
- Analyse if there are sub-groups of Erasmus students with different perceptions about the evolution of their skills and employability before and after Erasmus.
- Analyse which competencies are perceived by Erasmus students as most relevant to their employability.



The structure of this research will be based in four parts: Introduction, literature review, empirical study (method and results) and conclusion. In the Introduction we describe why this theme was chosen and how the study was made. In the literature review, we shortly describe the evidences other authors concluded in other researches, which support this investigation in order to have a basis for comparing the results of our research and in order to support the questionnaire we made. The empirical study is divided in two parts, method and results: in the method we described how the questionnaire was made, how we reached our participants and how the data of the research was collected and, finally, we show the detailed results of our study. Finally, in the conclusion, we discuss the results of the whole study, the limitations, the contributions and we compare our own conclusions to the literature review and to the expectations we had before the research.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Current General Context**

Over the last decades, substantial changes in the labour market and in the structure of organizations have led to a growing concern of individuals over their employability. Several authors have argued that traditional careers, characterized by life-time employment in the same organization and hierarchical progression managed on a planned basis by the organization, are doomed to disappear (Torrington, Hall & Taylor, 2008). Nowadays it is common that careers progress in multiple organizations and employees must themselves manage their own careers. Individuals must have a plan for increasing their employability, through continuous self-learning and the acquisition of new skills (Torrington et al., 2008).

Maintaining and increasing employability is often equated with the development of skills. In fact, rising numbers of employees holding university degrees have led to a devaluation of academic qualifications in the job market. There is a growing tendency of organizations to look further, not exclusively academic qualifications in candidates. Soft skills, such as the ability to successfully work in a team, and being open to changes related to work, are

often a key factor for employers to make a choice between two candidates (Van Dam, 2004).

Given this context where employability and the development of skills are central aspects in the labour market, with this dissertation we will try to analyse the impact that participating on the Erasmus program has on these two topics.

## **2.2. Erasmus General Context**

From a geopolitical perspective, the EU Council and the European Union's interest in harvesting mobility programs responds to a sociological and cultural interest of having a more cohesive European Union, a belief that has been linked to common market stability and national politics alignment with the Eurogroup economical provisions, by feeding the sentimental factor that is missing for the Union to completely succeed in a cultural sense, and prevent issues such as the ongoing Brexit, or the social rifts caused by the refugee crisis (Europa.eu, 2017).

It is also worth mentioning the large scale campaign the EU has undertaken in 2017 to promote the 30th anniversary of the Erasmus+ programme, with multiple declarations and festivities across all member states. Former Erasmus+ students, such as Carlos Moedas, European Commissioner for Research, Science and Innovation, were filmed documenting their own experience as Erasmus members and talking about how it changed

their perspective on the questions of nationality, professional and educational choices, frontiers, and much more.

Considerable literature can be found regarding the effects and outcomes of Erasmus exchange mobilities and related programs, and was used in the Erasmus Impact Study: the EURODATA Student Mobility in European Higher Education and the Flash Eurobarometers. (European Commission, 2014).

All the facts mentioned above, made researchers analyse the benefits of doing Erasmus. Two of them, which are the most relevant for this dissertation try to understand the impact of an Erasmus exchange on employability and improvement of skills. Erasmus Impact Study refers a large number of literature on the exclusive topic of positive effects of Erasmus-type mobilities in students and trainees, both EU-funded and independent.

Regarding the same study, researchers concluded that “one in two students who went abroad changed his or her personality traits, increased his or her intercultural competences and, in particular, developed his or her employability skills”. (European Commission, 2014, page 84)

In the next section, the links between Erasmus and the development of competencies and employability will be further analysed.

## **2.3. Erasmus and the development of competencies**

### **2.3.1 Definition of competencies**

Competence is a concept not easy to define regarding the fact that it can often be related with the term “skills” and also the fact it can have different variations, such as personal or professional competences. For this dissertation we used the generic concept of competences as “the knowledge, skills and attitude that can be used successfully in different working situations and professional contexts” (Eraut 1994; Everwijn 1993 in Vaastra and Vries, 2007, page 337).

In the following sections, we present some studies which analyse the impact of Erasmus for the development of competences. It is noteworthy that some authors prefer to use the term skills or soft skills.

### **2.3.2. Erasmus Impact Study**

The Erasmus Impact Study (European Commission, 2014) developed a method of measurement based on the memo-facts ©. The memo-facts © are a scale of measurements commanded by the European Commission, that ‘explicitly examines employability-related skills and their improvement through studying abroad’. The memo ©

methodology was developed by consulting agency CHE Consulting, according to which, the memo © factors 'is a unique psychometrics methodology designed to measure personality of individuals and support its development (European Commission, 2014).

It was created by CHE Consult to help universities stimulate students' "personal growth, to measure effects of interventions and experience such as international mobility or to select staff fitting the institution's needs" (Klicnikova, 2014). It is to be noted that these memo © factors can be equated to soft skills, as they have been developed and analysed by a number of other studies (Humburg et al., 2013 in European Commission, 2014).

For the Erasmus Impact Study, six memo © facts were used, selected because of their relevance to employability. All of these memo © facts were considered relevant by the pool of employers questioned in the study, in this order: curiosity ('openness to and curiosity about new challenges'), serenity ('awareness of one's own strengths and weaknesses'), confidence ('conviction regarding one's own abilities), tolerance of ambiguity ('tolerance towards other person's values and behaviour'), decisiveness ('better knowledge of what one wants and reaching decisions more easily'), vigour ('management of one's own career development, problem-solving skills').

Employers were also questioned in other relevant aspects regarding recent graduates' hiring process. Interpersonal and soft skills were very relevant for all groups of employers, as well as experience in the area, while international orientation was also valued. Language skills, Information and Communication Technology skills (ICTs) and

organisational skills were in the second tier of valued skills but still behind personal or soft skills. (European Commission, 2014).

The following step completed by the Erasmus Impact Study was to question mobile students about to what degree they considered they met these factors. Erasmus students after mobility did show a higher memo © value than 70% of the students, ranking especially high on the Confidence value. This meant that their advantage over non-mobile students increased by 42% in comparison with the pre-Erasmus experience, according to the study. In a more subjective way, Erasmus alumni were able to perceive a change on their own personality, further supporting the thesis already quantified by the psychometric test. (European Commission, 2014)

A fundamental aspect highlighted in the Erasmus Impact Study and the related studies by different sources including in the report, such as the VALERA study and the Eurobarometer studies is, also, the self-perception by students that their employable skills had improved. Alumni, according to the results presented by researchers, self-assessed themselves quite optimistically regarding their after mobility employability-related competences, ranking also much higher in the psychometric analysis than mobile students. (European Commission, 2014).

As a first conclusion, it can be argued that, according to Erasmus Impact Study, soft skills can be quantified and the extent to which Erasmus students are benefitted after taking part in an exchange can be measured, showing significant positive outcomes.

Language-related factors were considered by the researchers as variable of importance here, since students that take place in a mobility program acquire language skills faster than their counterparts, thus potentially opening more paths for internationally-oriented careers. When faced with the choice of receiving further education, alumni highly valued areas of study according to the possibility of finding jobs abroad.

However, and as reported by students themselves (and backed up by the psychometric studies and the mandatory language exams required from the EU that students must complete before, during, and after their exchange), improving foreign language skills is another positive and immediate benefit of exchanges. Intercultural communication skills, adaptation, improvisation, public speaking skills or the ability to bond over cultural differences, and many others, are aspects that Erasmus students also experience during their exchanges, and that, while not academically investigated in the consulted literature, can also be considered beneficial for individuals to understand the abroad mobilities as a holistic way for personal growth, instead of focusing strictly on employment-related outcomes. (European Commission, 2014)

In conclusion, regarding the extensive study made by European Commission in 2014, the mentioned Erasmus Impact study, we can briefly say that among the several advantages to do an Erasmus Exchange, regarding the development of competences, the students strongly improve competences such as: curiosity, confidence, tolerance of ambiguity, decisiveness, vigour, foreign language skills, public speaking, communication skills,



adaptation, improvisation and ability to bond over different cultures. (European Commission, 2014).

### **2.3.3 Other studies on Erasmus and the development of competencies**

The study made by Martinez Usarralde et al. (2017), analysed how the different agents involved in an Erasmus exchange (Organizations members, professors of Universities and the Erasmus Students) “perceive the influence of the Erasmus experience as regards the acquisition of capabilities in the form of individual freedoms (from the area of adaptive capabilities)” (Martinez Usarralde et al., 2017, page 106). They concluded that regarding the Erasmus experience a huge group of what they called “professional skills” were learned and improved by the Erasmus students. The authors divided the benefits of doing Erasmus in 6 areas which they called “Adaptive Capabilities”: Development of life projects, basic needs, mobility, professional development (skills), autonomy and development of individual intelligence. In one of these areas called “Professional Skills”, they found out that doing Erasmus promotes the acquisition of professional skills and contributes to the improvement of the higher education system in a way that makes an approach between the needs of the labour market and the competences students learn during the academic period. Among these competences, we highlight: mastery of other languages, autonomy, initiative, flexibility, empathy, capacity for adapting to multicultural environments and mind-opening. (Martinez Usarralde et al., 2017).

Bryla (2015a), published a paper regarding a study made with Polish alumni who have made an Erasmus exchange, which had as the main goal to understand the impact of an Erasmus exchange on their employability and professional career. The most relevant conclusions of this paper regarding the acquisition of competences, say very clearly that the Erasmus programme allows students to have an advantageous cultural and social experience and gain new skills/competences which future employers are looking for. From the competences learned, the author gives emphasis to language proficiency, considering it as very important regarding their job position or professional career (Bryla, 2015a)

The same author, in another study, tried to analyse the satisfaction of a group of International Polish alumni, regarding their Erasmus experience. This study, among other conclusions, verified that an Erasmus student can benefit from this experience, improving their foreign language skills, facilitating their social mobility and autonomy and increasing their self-confidence (Bryla, 2015b)

Therefore, with the literature read about competences, we can find a number of competences which Erasmus students can improve or acquire during their experience abroad.

## **2.4. Erasmus and employability**

### **2.4.1. Definition of employability**

The concept of employability is not easy to define, a brief literature review reveals multiple definitions from different authors. However, for this dissertation we used one of the concepts of employability that Guilbert et al., (2015) analysed after a review of different authors. These authors quoted Forrier and Sels, (2013) and proposed that employability is ‘a process that influences an individual’s chances of a job and steps in the internal and external labour market’. Both the individual, organizational and governmental dimensions would affect employability (Guilbert et al., 2015, page 7).

As far as the link between employability and Erasmus is concerned, two main approaches can be found in the literature. Some authors focus on employability as one of the reasons why students decide to do Erasmus. In general, these studies analyse the perceptions of students before Erasmus. The second approach focus on employability as a benefit of doing Erasmus and these studies analyse the perceptions of students after Erasmus.

### **2.4.2. Employability as a reason to do Erasmus**

Several authors have argued that nowadays work-related factors are becoming more important for students when they decide to take part in a mobility. Employability awareness, and consideration of international and intercultural experiences as a relevant

element for the CV have been on the rise, and post-mobility perceptions show even more awareness between alumni and employers. (eg European Commission, 2014)

In this sense, the team of the Erasmus Impact Study points to a “institutionalization and improvement in the perception of the programme itself; from origins linked more closely to the travelling and festive aspects, towards ‘professionalization’ of the admissions requirements, content and impact” (European Commission, 2014, page 99). It also links those factors with geopolitical and social circumstances such as the effects of the economic crisis in the South of Europe that would have led students to look for more opportunities abroad, and would take part in an Erasmus+ as a springboard for achieving better jobs in other countries than in their own.

The Erasmus Impact Study researchers’ optimism about the students’ reasons to do an Erasmus and their supposed awareness about Erasmus-gained skills’ relationship to employability may be considered an effort to legitimize the programme and boost its values. Furthermore, when analysing the parts of the study where employers are consulted, it seems that skills gained on Erasmus are beneficial for students, and that students become more aware of this after taking part of this exchange.

For this reason, promotion of these work-related benefits, and not only the so-called ‘festive’ aspects of the programme seem to be a good scenario for all, and perhaps it would help to demystify some of the clichés about the experience.

### **2.4.3. Employability as a benefit of doing Erasmus**

Nowadays, the Erasmus programme has been considered a way to increase the possibility of students to improve their employability opportunities.

One argument, often mentioned, is that “the Erasmus exchange may be a strong point in itself, in the sense that it may help to increase the level of employability, and it may turn into an advantage in the labour market competition, as an element that most employers appreciate as positive” (Dolga et al. 2014, page 1012).

According to Martinez-Usarralde et al. (2017) “this program promotes the development of capabilities as regards adaptation of participants to different environments, the development of skills suited to the labour market, the increase in opportunities for employment and broadening in the range of options for life projects” ( page 7).

Bryla (2015<sup>a</sup>) concludes that the Erasmus program is associated with the enhancement of employability for the students who had the possibility to make an Erasmus exchange. In the same study, the author analysed the Programme Erasmus as a tool for students to improve and obtain competences which the employers are nowadays looking for. These competences are easily acquired while doing an experience abroad, which forces students to take the initiative more often and to live in an environment out of their comfort zone,

where they have to learn how to skip barriers they can eventually find as the language of the country, culture differences or eventually different methods of study.

Thus, as mentioned before, regarding the fact that Erasmus Programme is increasing during the last few years in terms of number of participants, it is relevant to analyse that Erasmus is a tool which can at the same time give the participants better job opportunities and at the same time an advantage to the recruiters of the companies who noticed recently that with the current labour market changes they cannot find in regular students all the competences and skills they need to become competitive on their business markets. This conclusion allows us to find out a strong connection between Erasmus exchange and the impact it has on Employability perspectives.

## **2.5 – The relationship between the development of competences and employability.**

The link between the development of skills and employability has been studied in research projects not connected to Erasmus. For example, Serim et al., (2014) undertook a research in Istanbul, examining 175 workers of different fields, and found employees' perceptions of the relevance of competence models have a positive effect on employability outcomes. An interesting result was that an increase on the development of the worker's degree of flexibility, openness and proactivity could open the way for employability activities that could both provide him with new, transferable competencies and higher responsibilities..

As far as the Erasmus context in concerned, studies on the development of skills and employability generally assume that the former lead to the latter. For example, Martinez-Usarralde et al. (2017), concluded that an Erasmus Exchange contributes significantly to the improvement of what he called “professional skills which are valued in today’s job market” and it can be inferred that employability is increased.

We were unable to find empirical studies simultaneously measuring the development of skills and employability in the Erasmus context. This reinforced our decision to undertake an empirical study including the two variables. This study will be described in the following chapter.

Therefore, regarding the competency models mentioned above with the benefits of doing Erasmus regarding the improvement and acquisition of competences which recruiters are looking for nowadays, we believe there is also a direct connection between employability and the improvement/acquisition of competences in Erasmus. However, we could not find on the reviewed literature a study analysing the direct impact between them, which also made this dissertation focus on the study of this correlation.

### **3. Empirical study**

#### **3.1. Method**

To obtain a sample of participants, e-mails were sent to contacts in the database of ESN (Erasmus Student Network) Association in Lisbon. This database includes data on people who have done Erasmus in Lisbon. The e-mail provided a link to *Qualtrics*, where the questionnaire was placed. Recipients were asked to forward the e-mail to other people they knew who had also done Erasmus. The whole process was undertaken between July and August 2017.

About 200 e-mails were sent to students who did Erasmus between 2013 and 2017. A total of 118 questionnaires were completed via *Qualtrics*. The response rate is apparently 59%, but this number may be biased because, since the initial 200 contacts were asked to forward the e-mail and we have no information on how many of the respondents were from the initial 200.

##### **3.1.1. Participants**

In the total sample of 118 participants, 33 (27,7%) were Male and 85 (71,4%) were female. All the participants were born between 1989 and 1996, with a majority of



87 (73,8%) people between 1992 and 1995. About half of the participants (67, 56,3%) did Erasmus in Portugal and the other were scattered in 20 other countries. From the answers we collected, the most-represented country of origin is Italy with a total of 36 (30,3%) participants, followed by Portugal with 19 (16,1%), Romania with 7 (5,9%), Spain and Czech Republic with 6 (5,1%) each. The questionnaire was done only for participants who did Erasmus between 2013 and 2017. About half of participants (60 - 50,4%), were studying Social Sciences, which was the largest group in the field of studies, followed by Humanities with 25(21,2%), Applied Sciences with 22(18,6%), Natural Sciences with 7(5,9%) and Arts with 3(2,5%). In total, 104(87,4%) of the participants fulfilled all the academic objectives that were set for the Erasmus Exchange Program and 50% (59) of them are currently working.

### **3.1.2. Instrument**

The instrument is divided in two main parts, a first one on students' perceptions on the impact of Erasmus for the development of professional skills and a second part related with their perception on the impact of Erasmus for employability.

For the first part, called "Professional skills", we used the list of 33 skills identified by Martínez-Usarralde et al. (2017) as the main skills students can acquire while doing Erasmus. For each skill, participants were asked to rate themselves regarding their skills

before and after Erasmus were concerned. A 7-point scale was used, where 1=extremely poor and 7=excellent.

The second part, called "Promotion of employability", consists of a group of 6 questions developed specifically for the purpose of this study. We were unable to find a scale of employability related to Erasmus and so we attempted to develop items connected with the concept. The items cover themes such as number of job opportunities, enrichment of CV, and opinions of employers. A 7-point scale was used, where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree. Reliability tests indicate that the 6-item scale has good psychometric properties, with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0,848, and items having correlations with the total scale above 0,4 (Table I).

**Table I - Reliability of the Employability Scale**

	<b>Corrected Item- Total Correlation</b>	<b>Cronbach's alpha if Item Deleted</b>
<i>I have more job opportunities than I would have if I had not done Erasmus</i>	0,468	0,860
<i>I have more job opportunities than my colleagues who did not do Erasmus</i>	0,782	0,799
<i>Employers in my country value CVs with an Erasmus experience when recruiting young graduates</i>	0,651	0,819
<i>Employers in Europe value CVs with an Erasmus experience when recruiting young graduates</i>	0,690	0,816
<i>It is easier to find a job in my field if you have an Erasmus experience</i>	0,653	0,820
<i>I believe doing Erasmus had a positive effect on my employability</i>	0,638	0,823

### 3.2. Results

As presented in the introduction, the first objective was to analyse the perception Erasmus students have about the evolution of their skills. For this, we used paired samples t-test for each skill, where the pair was composed by the two ratings – before and after Erasmus. For all the 33 competences, there was a significant difference in the rating before and after Erasmus ( $p < 0,05$ ). In all cases, the rating after Erasmus was significantly higher than the rating before Erasmus (Table II)

**Table II – Paired samples t-test**

<i>Pair</i>		<b>Mean</b>	<b>t-value</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
<i>Flexibility</i>	Before Erasmus	4,36	-20,134	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	6,28			
<i>Initiative</i>	Before Erasmus	4,28	-15,865	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	6,03			
<i>Self-Management</i>	Before Erasmus	4,42	-14,615	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	6,16			
<i>Responsibility</i>	Before Erasmus	5,14	-7,662	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	6,09			
<i>Problem Solving</i>	Before Erasmus	4,71	-13,311	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	6,16			
<i>Social Skills</i>	Before Erasmus	4,76	-15,811	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	6,37			
<i>Entrepreneurship</i>	Before Erasmus	4,05	-10,994	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	5,15			
<i>Efficiency</i>	Before Erasmus	4,64	-8,917	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	5,54			
<i>Negotiation</i>	Before Erasmus	4,38	-9,972	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	5,34			
<i>Communication Skills</i>	Before Erasmus	4,59	-19,547	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	6,38			
<i>Tolerance for others</i>	Before Erasmus	5,06	-10,994	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	6,36			
<i>Adapting to change</i>	Before Erasmus	4,82	-15,757	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	6,54			
<i>Pro-activeness</i>	Before Erasmus	4,50	-14,163	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	5,82			
<i>Personal Maturity</i>	Before Erasmus	4,73	-16,093	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	6,10			
<i>Courage</i>	Before Erasmus	4,32	-14,696	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	6,01			
<i>Respect for others</i>	Before Erasmus	5,76	-9,458	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	6,59			
<i>Team Work</i>	Before Erasmus	4,93	-9,286	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	6,00			
<i>Independence</i>	Before Erasmus	4,91	-15,006	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	6,55			
<i>Coping with uncertain situations</i>	Before Erasmus	4,50	-13,481	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	5,82			
<i>Mastery of foreign languages</i>	Before Erasmus	4,38	-18,242	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	6,14			
<i>Management of resources</i>	Before Erasmus	4,55	-11,179	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	5,67			

**Table II – Paired samples t-test**

<i>Pair</i>		<b>Mean</b>	<b>t-value</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
<i>Building a network of relationships</i>	Before Erasmus	4,55	-15,200	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	6,16			
<i>Initiating changes</i>	Before Erasmus	4,51	-14,811	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	5,87			
<i>Meeting new challenges</i>	Before Erasmus	4,50	-15,464	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	6,17			
<i>Integration in multidisciplinary teams</i>	Before Erasmus	4,50	-12,578	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	6,17			
<i>Attention to career possibilities</i>	Before Erasmus	4,39	-14,158	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	6,17			
<i>Willingness to learn</i>	Before Erasmus	5,06	-10,989	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	6,23			
<i>Use of Information Technologies</i>	Before Erasmus	4,84	-8,483	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	5,63			
<i>Adapting to new countries</i>	Before Erasmus	4,62	-14,645	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	6,41			
<i>Adapting to a multicultural environment</i>	Before Erasmus	4,80	-14,144	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	6,55			
<i>Empathy</i>	Before Erasmus	5,02	-11,235	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	6,04			
<i>Autonomy</i>	Before Erasmus	4,84	-13,406	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	6,23			
<i>Broad-mindedness</i>	Before Erasmus	4,97	-12,709	118	0,000
	After Erasmus	6,24			

The second objective was to analyse the perception that Erasmus student have about their employability after they finish Erasmus. A new variable was computed, by averaging the 6 items of the second part of the questionnaire. This variable was labelled “Employability”. In the total sample, this variable had a mean of 5,88 and a standard deviation of 0,95. This means, it is well above the theoretical mid-point of the scale, which in a 7-point scale is 4.

The third objective was to analyse whether there are sub-groups of Erasmus Students with different perceptions about their evolution of skills and their employability. The subgroups were identified by gender (Male and Female), by the fulfilment of objectives that were set for the Erasmus Exchange (Fulfilled or Not fulfilled) and by the current employment situation (Employed or Non-employed).

To have a measure of evolution of skills, new variables were created. For each skill, we computed the difference between the rating before Erasmus and the rating after Erasmus. Subsequently we conducted ANOVA to analyse differences in the sub-groups. As far as gender is concerned, significant differences were found for initiative, adapting to change, autonomy, initiating changes, meeting new challenges and integration in multidisciplinary teams ( $p < 0,05$ ). In all cases, females have a higher perception of the positive evolution of their skills. As far as employment situation was concerned, a significant difference was found for employability, with participants who are employed having a higher perception of employability. For fulfilment of objectives, no significant differences were found.

**Table III: Development of skills by gender and employability**

<i>Variable</i>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
<i>Initiative</i>	Male	1,3939	4,208	0,042
	Female	1,8941		
<i>Adapting to change</i>	Male	1,2727	6,714	0,011
	Female	1,8941		
<i>Autonomy</i>	Male	1,0303	4,542	0,035
	Female	1,5176		
<i>Initiating changes</i>	Male	1,0606	4,837	0,030
	Female	1,4941		
<i>Meeting new challenges</i>	Male	1,818	8,032	0,005
	Female	1,8471		
<i>Integration in multidisciplinary teams</i>	Male	0,9091	8,344	0,005
	Female	1,6235		
<i>Employability</i>	Employed	5,8814	7,569	0,007
	Not-employed	5,5124		

The fourth and final objective was to understand which competences are perceived by Erasmus students as being more associated with their employability. For this we conducted a stepwise regression analysis, with employability as the dependent variable and the 33 skills after Erasmus as the independent variables.

The model obtained only retained three of the 33 skills: Broad-mindedness, attention to career possibilities and autonomy. These three skills explain 34,6% of the variance employability ( $R^2$ ) as showed in the table below (Table IV).



**Table IV – The competences more associated with the employability of Erasmus Students**

<i>Predictor</i>	<b>R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Std Beta</b>	<b>t-value</b>	<b>p-value</b>
<i>Broad-mindedness</i>	0,346	0,405	4,793	0,000
<i>Attention to career possibilities</i>		0,189	2,293	0,24
<i>Autonomy</i>		0,165	2,035	0,044



## 4. Conclusion

### 4.1. Summary of results

This dissertation proposed various points for investigation. The main results found can be summarized as:

- Participants of the study perceive that their soft skills have significantly improved as a result of participating in Erasmus.. This conclusion is in accordance with the literature review, where several authors found similar results.
- Regarding the perception the participants had about their possibilities of becoming employed after the Erasmus Experience, the results indicate that students perceive that doing Erasmus strongly increases their employability prospects.
- An interesting conclusion of this study is that females perception of their development of skills is significantly higher than the perception of their male counterparts. Female participants have a higher sense of the positive evolution of their soft skills, specially: initiative, adapting to change, autonomy, initiating changes, meeting new challenges and integrating in multidisciplinary teams.
- It was also interesting to note that the participants who were already employed at the time the questionnaire was made had a higher perception of the advantages of doing Erasmus and its positive impact on employability, in comparison with students that were not employed yet.

- Finally, a stepwise regression analysis was undertaken in order to identify, out of the 33 soft skills analysed, which ones were considered more important for employability. Results indicate that broad-mindedness, attention to career possibilities and autonomy are the most important.

The results presented above, support the phenomenon of Erasmus exchange, which has increased in the last years. Nowadays, the advantages of an experience studying abroad, seem strongly important for the Curriculum of the youngsters, who have the opportunity to improve the skills that can be important for their future when looking for a job.

Therefore, regarding the connection found between doing Erasmus and the possibility to improve soft skills, we can also connect the Erasmus exchange with employability, since this experience prepare the students for the tendencies of the labour market of today.

#### **4.2. Major contributions**

One of the contribution of the study is the development of a measure of employability which can be used in the context of Erasmus. The reliability analysis was promising, leading us to believe that this measure can be successfully used in subsequent researches.

Whereas previous study only studied the development of competences and from there concluded that employability had increased, we introduced a measurement of

employability along with the measurement of competences. This allowed us to identify which competences were seen as contributing more to employability, an analysis that, to the best of our knowledge, had not been undertaken before.

Finally, by introducing the variable “gender” in the analysis, we found that females have a perception of the development of competences that is significantly higher than the perception of males. In previous studies we did not find gender analysis and so we believe that this result is a contribution that may be interesting to follow in subsequent researches.

#### **4.3. Limitations**

The sample of participants was not large enough in order to reach stronger conclusions about the analysed factors. We also could not analyse whether differences in skills growth perceptions could be affected by other variables, such as country, age, study area and year in which the exchange was made, because there was not a sufficient number of participants in all the groups.

It is also worth noting that the Erasmus Impact Study, made in 2014 by the European Commission, included two types of assessments for participants: one based on self-assessment, like the one used in this dissertation, and another based on psychometric external analyses. This double method allowed researchers to prove that not only did students consider themselves to have improved certain employable skills, but external

tests gave the same evidence. While this dissertation was based exclusively on self-assessment, we believe that it is supported by the scope of the Erasmus Impact Study from previous research that also concluded that Erasmus+ students indeed improve their soft skills while on mobility.

#### **4.4. Suggestions for future research**

The number of answers did not allow us to understand the impact of Erasmus exchanges, and whether cultural and nationality differences have an impact in students' skills development, which is an interesting point for further research. It would also be interesting to explore why females had a higher perception of the development of their soft skills after the Erasmus Exchange.

Another suggestion for future research would be to have a control group made up by students that did not do Erasmus in order to better understand the effects of the Erasmus Exchange on the perception of soft skills development. Both groups could also be analysed a year after graduation, in order to learn about their job status, to better connect employability and Erasmus.

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## **Annexes**

### **Questionnaire**



**Default Question Block**

The following questionnaire analyses students' perceptions on the impact of Erasmus for the development of professional skills and for the promotion of employability. Please be as sincere as possible, there are no correct or incorrect answers, what matters is your opinion. The questionnaire is totally anonymous and results will be used solely for academic purposes.

**Block 1**

PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

In this part of the questionnaire we ask you to rate yourself in a set of professional skills. For each skill, we ask you to rate your level of competence from 1 to 7, where:

1 = Extremely poor

7 = Excellent

We ask for your perception of your personal level of expertise BEFORE and AFTER the Erasmus experience

	BEFORE Erasmus							AFTER Erasmus						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Flexibility	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Initiative	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Self management	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Responsibility	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Problem solving	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social Skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Entrepreneurship	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Efficiency	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Negotiation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

<https://co1.qualtrics.com/ControlPanel/Ajax.php?action=GetSurveyPrintPreview>

1/7



10/13/2017

Qualtrics Survey Software

	BEFORE Erasmus							AFTER Erasmus						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Communication skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tolerance for others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adapting to change	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Block 2**

PROFESSIONAL SKILLS (Cont.)

In this part of the questionnaire we ask you to rate yourself in a set of professional skills. For each skill, we ask you to rate your level of competence from 1 to 7, where:

1 = Extremely poor

7 = Excellent

We ask for your perception of your personal level of expertise BEFORE and AFTER the Erasmus experience

	BEFORE Erasmus							AFTER Erasmus						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Pro-activeness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Personal Maturity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Courage	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Respect for others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Team work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Independence	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Coping with uncertain situations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mastery of foreign languages	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Management of resources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Use of information technologies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adapting to new countries	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adapting to a multicultural environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Block 3**

PROFESSIONAL SKILLS (Cont.)



In this part of the questionnaire we ask you to rate yourself in a set of professional skills. For each skill, we ask you to rate your level of competence from 1 to 7, where:  
1 = Extremely poor  
7 = Excellent  
We ask for your perception of your personal level of expertise BEFORE and AFTER the Erasmus experience

	BEFORE Erasmus							AFTER Erasmus						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Empathy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Autonomy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Broad-mindedness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Building a network of relationships	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Initiating changes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Meeting new challenges	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Integration in multidisciplinary teams	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Attention to career possibilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Willingness to learn	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Block 4**

EMPLOYABILITY

In this part, we ask you to rate your level of agreement or disagreement with a group of statements concerning the effect of Erasmus on your employability. Please use a scale from 1 to 8, where:  
1 = Strongly disagree  
7 = Strongly agree

	1 -	2 -	3 -	4 -	5 -	6 -	7 -
	Strongly	Disagree	Somewhat	Neither	Somewhat	Agree	Strongly
	disagree		disagree	agree	agree		agree
				nor			
				disagree			
I have more job	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
opportunities than							
I would have if I							
had not done							
Erasmus							



I have more job opportunities than my colleagues who did not do Erasmus

Employers in my country value CVs with an Erasmus experience when recruiting young graduates

Employers in Europe value Cvs with an Erasmus experience when recruiting young graduates

It is easier to find a job in my field if you have an Erasmus experience

Employers in my country believe all Erasmus students do is have fun

Employers in my country do not believe Erasmus students develop skills that are useful in work settings

I believe doing Erasmus had a positive effect on my employability

**Block 5**

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

Gender

- Male
- Female



Year of birth

Country where you did Erasmus

Country where you were studying before Erasmus

When did you do Erasmus?

- 2013/2014
- 2014/2015
- 2015/2016
- 2016/2017

What was your area of studies ?

- Arts (Performing arts; Visual arts)
- Humanities (Geography; History; Languages and literature; Philosophy; Theology)
- Social sciences (Economics; Law; Political science; Psychology; Sociology)
- Natural sciences (Biology; Chemistry; Earth and space sciences; Mathematics; Physics)
- Applied sciences (Agriculture and agricultural sciences; Computer science; Engineering and technology; Medicine and health sciences)

Did you fulfill all the academic objectives that were set for your Erasmus Exchange?

- Yes
- No

Are you currently working?

- Yes