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ERASMUS STUDENTS’ EXPECTATIONS AND COMPETENCES DEVELOPMENT: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF INCOMING STUDENTS IN PORTUGAL

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ABSTRACT
The purpose of this paper was to explore Erasmus incoming students’ expectations and core competences development during their period of stay abroad. Competences were analyzed regarding European framework on key competences for lifelong learning. Using qualitative and quantitative methodologies, the exploratory research was carried out in two stages, namely at the beginning of the semester (to analyse expectations) and at the end of the semester (to analyse core competences development). Our main findings were that Erasmus student expect and perceive that develop more their linguistic, cultural and professional competences and less their mathematical, scientific and technological competences.

Keywords: Erasmus mobility, higher education, core competences, students’ expectations.

INTRODUCTION
Erasmus has become the most widespread and successful short-term students’ horizontal mobility programme in Europe. On the overall, most students that participate in Erasmus are highly satisfied with the programme. Students have different motivations to study abroad, but the main motivations appeared to be to enhance their linguistic, cultural and professional competences and less their academic competences. Though perceiving their academic achievement as essential, Erasmus students’ expect to develop and perceive they develop more competences related to human and social interaction than competences to science and technology.

The main aims of this paper were to analyse Erasmus incoming students’ expectations and perceptions on the development of core competences and employability during their period of stay in Portugal. In order to achieve our aim we carried out a two stage exploratory study. An open-questionnaire was applied in the beginning of the semester to analyse students’ expectations and a closed-questionnaire was applied at the end of the semester. Content analysis, using the core competences for lifelong learning as predefined categories and statistical analysis, using IBM SPSS Statistics 21, was carried out.

The paper is structured as follows: description of framework about Erasmus students’ mobility; methodology; analysis and discussion of the results; main conclusions.