

An Evaluation of the Contributions of European Union Education and Youth Programs to Schools: Case of Comenius Multilateral Projects*

Avrupa Birliği Eğitim ve Gençlik Programlarının Okullara Katkısı: Comenius Çok Taraflı Okul Ortaklıkları Projeleri Örneği

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Öz. Bu nitel araştırmanın temel amacı Avrupa Birliği Eğitim ve Gençlik Programları kapsamında yer alan Comenius Çok Taraflı Okul Ortaklıkları Projelerinin okullara katkısına ilişkin öğretmen görüşlerini ortaya koymaktır. Araştırmada fenomenoloji deseni kullanılmıştır. Bu kapsamda, Comenius Çoklu Okul Ortaklıkları Projelerine katılım gösteren okullarda görev yapan otuz öğretmen araştırmaya katılmıştır. Araştırmanın katılımcıları amaçlı örnekleme yöntemlerinden aşırı/aykırı durum örnekleme tekniği ile seçilmiştir. Araştırma verileri yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formları aracılığıyla toplanmış ve içerik analizi ile çözümlenmiştir. Araştırma bulguları Comenius Çok Taraflı Okul Ortaklıkları Projelerine ilişkin katılımcıların olumlu algılara sahip olduklarını ve katılımcıların kişisel/mesleki, sosyal, kültürel gelişimlerine ve yabancı dil öğrenmelerine büyük ölçüde katkıda bulunduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Bununla beraber, projelerin kurumsal düzeyde okullara sınırlı düzeyde katkıda bulunduğu ve bu katkıların da çoğunlukla projelerde aktif rol alan öğretmenler ve katılımcı okullar lehine olduğu ortaya çıkmıştır. Bu doğrultuda, Comenius projelerinin, katkılarını arttırmak için katılımcılar tarafından problem olarak ileri sürülen görüşlerin dikkate alınması gerekmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler. Avrupa Birliği Eğitim ve Gençlik Programları, Comenius Çok Taraflı Okul Ortaklıkları Projeleri, öğretmenler, okullar.

Abstract: The primary aim of this qualitative study is to explore the opinions of teachers about the contributions of Comenius Multilateral Projects, included in the European Union Education and Youth Programs, to the schools. A phenomenology design was used in the study. Thirty teachers working in schools who have previously took part in Comenius projects participated in this study. The participants were selected on the basis of extreme/deviant sampling technique. The data were collected using semi-structured interviews and analyzed through content analysis. The results revealed that while Comenius projects were perceived as highly positive and contributed to participants' personal/professional, social, cultural development and language learning to a large extent; the contributions of these projects to the schools remained limited and were mostly in favor of the individuals taking active roles and participant institutions. Thus, it is suggested that the factors conveyed by the participants as problems should be taken into consideration in order to increase the contributions of the projects.

Keywords: European Union Education and Youth Programs, Comenius Multilateral Projects, teachers, schools.

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Introduction

The European Union (EU) claimed to have an economic and politic character from the very first day of its foundation, has started to “become more integrated as a social and cultural community over the past 30 years” (Philippou, 2005, p. 293). Thus, the educational matters which were related to economic mandate of the European Economic Community (EEC) at the beginning of integration process took a social and cultural form and general education was paid attention as well as vocational education (Arkan and Gürleyen, 2016). This also brought an increased emphasis on the role of education in the progress of EU and the field of education which never played a central role in EU policy (Fredriksson, 2003) has been attached more importance as the fourth pillar of the European construction (Nóvoa and deJong-Lambert, 2002). “In terms of its socio-cultural dimension, education was seen as a means of integrating and socializing younger generations of Europeans in a European environment through exchange and mobility programs, and a ‘European content’ in education” (Arkan & Gürleyen, 2016, p. 167). Within this context, the EU introduced some policies which enable consolidation of the harmony among the citizens by supporting exchange of students and teachers and empowering EU’s integration and these policies contributed to applying the policies such as community, unemployment, research, technological development, environment (Horvath, 2007). European education policies mainly aim to improve the quality of education in an attempt to expand the notion of lifelong learning; enable the qualifications and diplomas to be recognized within EU (Fredriksson, 2003), improve the knowledge regarding languages used rarely in EU countries, examine the common policy fields and issues, and struggle against social exclusion, racism and ethnocentrism (Top, 2006).

Having a significant place in the implementation of EU policies as a political means (Yağmurlu, 2012), EU Education and Youth Programs have been suggested vital in the Union’s achieving its future aims. These programs have such common aims as increasing the quality of education in cultural integrity (Peck, 1997); enhancing the knowledge and understanding about the different cultures and languages in EU (European Commission, 2006); fostering the new basic in education practices, especially in information technologies (European Council, 2000); promoting the European dimension in education by providing cooperation among teachers and students with international mobility (Ertl, 2003; IKV, 2004; Enders & Teichler, 2006). EU Education and Youth Programs are of particular importance to create a European identity through education and in this sense mobility programs or projects are considered as tools for the construction of a Europeanization and citizenship as they encourage international understanding, European consciousness and identity by promoting the feeling of belonging to Europe (Cunha, 2006; Nóvoa, 1998).

EU Education programs undergoing various changes in terms of aims and structures have been named differently such as Socrates I-II (1995-2006), Lifelong Learning (2007-2013) and Erasmus+ (2014-2020) since their first initiation phase. Of these programs, Lifelong Learning Program (LLP) is “an important step in Europeanization of education from above” (Schreiner, 2007, p. 7) and has the most impact area in terms of its huge number of beneficiaries: schools, teachers, students, families, etc. LLP aims to realize a social integration which forms an information society under the roof of European Union (Toygur, 2012) and ensure greater coherence between education and training actions and to support more effectively the implementation of lifelong learning (Schreiner, 2007, p. 7). Within the scope of this program whose priority is to increase the contribution of education and training to the EU 2020 primary targets and having the education philosophy ‘from cradle to grave’ (European Commission, 2011), there are four sectoral sub-programs such as Comenius (School Training), Erasmus (Higher Education), Leonardo da Vinci (Vocational Education) and Grundtvig (Adult

Education). Comenius Program whose target group is mostly students, teachers, local authorities and non-governmental organizations aims to provide opportunities for all students to realize their proficiencies; support the schools' cooperation with the local authorities, non-governmental organizations and parents (Theodosopoulou, 2010). Furthermore, it intends to increase the qualification of teachers, school leaders and other school staff by promoting the international exchange of them on a regular basis (Enders & Teichler, 2006) and to develop understanding and knowledge concerning the diversity of European cultures and languages (European Commission, 2006). It has three core fields of activity like School Partnerships, In Service Teacher Training and Networks. Multilateral and Bilateral School Partnerships included in School Partnerships aim to support teachers and students to take responsibility and expand their knowledge about different cultures, language learning, etc. (Kulaksız, 2010) and increase the quality among schools encouraging cooperation 'by giving the opportunity to develop joint learning projects' (European Commission, 2013).

The LLP has been replaced by a new program called Erasmus+ since 2014 and it aims to create a single integrated program bringing most of EU's program together to have a more efficient, easily applicable and simple structure; however, there are not any significant differences among the practices of the previous programs in terms of objectives (Center of European Union Education and Youth Programs, 2014). The program which is compatible with the Europe 2020 strategy aims to fulfill lifelong learning and mobility, increase the quality and efficiency in education, and to enable equality, social solidarity and active citizenship (Official Journal of the European Union, 2009, C119/2).

Taking the changes of the names and contents of the programs throughout their implementation process from the very beginning into consideration, it can be asserted that it intends to simplify their structures. Nevertheless, structural problems faced in the implementation phases of the programs continued and the attempts to improve the process did not put forth any striking results. Accordingly, some criticisms regarding were expressed. One of the most significant criticisms towards both policies and programs is that they do not serve the purpose of including the concepts such as equality of opportunity, inclusion and social justice though they are frequently referred in EU official documents and reports (Kaya, 2014). These criticisms reflected themselves with such practices as injustice distribution of funds allocated for lifelong learning programs (Field, 1997) and the difficulty of taking part in lifelong learning programs for the disadvantaged groups in society (Mitchell, 2006, Kaya, 2014). Also, such problems as "the success of programs' being limited with just the people and institutions directly involved in the projects; difficulties experienced with the adaptation of the project results to the education systems of countries; the lack of support for projects; bureaucratic obstacles within both international and national level; discrepancy between the aims of the programs and their budgets; falling short of evaluating the programs and projects, inefficacy of programs in terms of sustainability and sharp differentiation among programs have been encountered in the implementation of the programs since the introduction of these programs in 1995 (Ertl, 2003; Kısakürek, 2003; Postacı, 2004). However, it is noteworthy to state that the programs and the projects in this regard have contributed to both organizations and the participants to a large extent (Colón-Plana, 2012; Cook, 2012; Diamantopoulou, 2006; European Commission, 2007; European Commission, 2013; European Commission, 2012; Gutiérrez-Colón Plana, 2012; Kassel, 2007; Pirrie, Hamilton, Kirk & Davidson, 2004; Vabo, 2007).

Since 2004, Turkey has been a partner of EU Education and Youth Programs and the Europeanization of Turkey's education policy and system was ensured largely through projects which were carried out in the field of education in an attempt to improve the quality of education. Between the years of 2007 and 2013, Turkey has been among the first three all around the Europe and 285.000 individuals,

students, teachers, principals, etc., who applied to the LLP benefitted from these programs and they were granted with a ratio of 92 %. Similarly, according to the Ministry for EU Affairs (2014), Turkey ranked the first among 33 countries in terms of the number of applications across Europe. In this sense, 1781 applications were made and 521 of them were granted with around 11,5 million Euros. This interest and attendance have increased the importance of these programs and the number of EU projects in Turkey is increasing day by day. Since the first day the program has been launched in Turkey, it has contributed to schools and participants to a large extent in Turkey and it was revealed in various researches. In this sense it was identified that Comenius Multilateral Projects, generally called as Comenius Projects have improved the participants' personal, professional, social skills; increased their language learning proficiencies and successes and promoted their awareness of not only partner cultures but also their own cultures (Aydoğmuş, 2013; Bahadır, 2007; Dilekli, 2008; Erdoğan, 2009; Haspolatlı, 2006; Kulaksız, 2010; Yılmaz, 2019). These practices offering the participants new perspectives and experiences also brought vision to the school organizations; contributed to the prestige of the schools; had a positive impact on schools' interaction with other institutions and schools and therefore improved school climate significantly (Bardakçı, 2017; Bardakçı & Aksu, 2019; Kulaksız, 2010; Öztürk, 2015; Yılmaz, 2019). Thus, it seems important to determine the contributions of these projects in particular and EU Education and Youth Programs in general to schools and school members. That is why, the aim of this research is to determine the opinions of teachers about the contributions of Comenius Multilateral Projects (CMP) to the schools in Turkey. In this regard, it is attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What do you think about the contributions of EU Projects to the institutional development of your school?
2. What do you think about the contributions of EU Projects to your personal/professional development?
3. What do you think about the contributions of EU Projects to your social development?
4. What do you think about the contributions of EU Projects to your cultural development?
5. What do you think about the contributions of EU Projects to language learning?

Methodology

This is a qualitative study examining the contributions of Comenius Multilateral Projects (CMP) to the schools in Turkey. Qualitative research methods aim to identify people's beliefs, experiences and attitudes enhancing their involvement in a study (Pathak, Jena & Kalra, 2013, 1). In this study, phenomenology design in which the participants' specific statements and experiences are examined in detail was used. In phenomenological researches, what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon is described (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano & Morales, 2007, p. 252) and an integrated description of how they experience it is given (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological design was preferred in this study so that the researchers could understand the contributions of Comenius Multilateral Projects (CMP) from the perspective of participants who experienced and observed and determine the themes and theoretical structures which describe the process of taking part in a CMP.

Participants

As the participants of a phenomenological study need to be multiple individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon in question (Creswell, 2007, p. 128), purposive sampling method which gives way to examine the cases that are thought to have a wide array of knowledge in a detailed way is used to determine the participants (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). Because significant differences were identified between the opinions of teachers who took active roles and those who did not about the contributions of EU Projects in various researches, (Colon-Plana, 2012; Dilekli, 2008; European Commission, 2013; Haspolatlı, 2006; Kassel, 2007; Kesik, 2016; Yağmurlu, 2012), the study group of this research was determined through the extreme/deviant sampling technique to provide interesting contrasts between different cases and allowing for comparability across those cases (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Extreme and deviant cases may have an important impact on revealing more comprehensive data and examining the research problem more thoroughly compared with normal cases (Glesne, 2012; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). Within this context, while taking active role in projects was accepted as extreme case, not taking an active role was accepted as deviant case in this research. Also, in order to assure participants' variety, the levels (primary, secondary and high school) and types (public and private) of schools that teachers worked at and their subject areas were taken into consideration. Of the schools at which the participants worked, one was a special education secondary school which included the students who have hearing impaired; two schools were vocational and technical high schools located in a socioeconomically disadvantaged area. Two of them were Anatolian high schools and two of them were primary schools in the centre. Also, two of the schools that were determined were private primary and secondary schools in an area with a high socio-economic level. All in all, thirty teachers who worked at schools which had different characteristics and developed a Comenius Project participated in the research. A more detailed information about the characteristics of the participants is given in the following table:

Table 1.

Personal characteristics of the participants

Variable		Frequency (n)
Gender	Female	19
	Male	11
Subject area	Turkish and Social Studies	4
	Science and Math	5
	Foreign language	6
	Classroom	8
	Others	7
School level	Primary School	8
	Secondary School	8
	High School	14
School type	Public	24
	Private	6
Taking active roles	Yes	16
	No	14
	Total	30

As seen in the table, of those 30 teachers, 19 were female and 11 were male; 4 of them were Turkish and social studies teachers, 5 of them were science and maths teachers; 6 of them were foreign language (4 of them were English and 2 of them were German teachers); 8 teachers were classroom

teachers and 7 teachers taught other subjects such as art, music, physical education, etc. Of these teachers, while 24 of them worked at public schools; 6 of them worked at private schools. Also 8 of them worked at primary schools, 8 of them worked at secondary schools and 14 of them worked at high schools. Lastly, 16 of them took active roles in projects and went to a European country, 14 of them did not take active roles, they did not go abroad and they were in observer position.

Data Collection

Ethical issues have been given utmost importance at all stages of this study. Legal permission was obtained from the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) and the participants were chosen among the volunteers. The researchers aimed to build trust and informed the participants about the confidentiality of the data collected by the interviewers. In phenomenological research, as the primary source of data is the experiences of the participants who are studied, in depth interviews are often used as a means of data collection (Ploeg, 1999, p. 36). Semi-structured interviews are one of the most widely used interview types and it can be carried out either individually or in groups. Individual interviews enable the researcher to examine the personal and social issues in detail (Bloom & Crabtree, 2006) and the interviewee to feel more relaxed by offering a more relaxing atmosphere in the process of data collection (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Most of the interviews were recorded by a tape recorder, and some were recorded as written notes at times when the teachers did not wish that their voice to be recorded on tape. The interviews lasted approximately 40-60 minutes.

Data Collection Instrument

Semi-structured interview forms are frequently preferred by the researchers due to their such advantages as being flexible, not having a certain standart, enabling the researcher to collect more detailed data and find more participants and analysing the data more easily compared to other data collection instruments (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). In this research which the data were gathered through semi-structured interview forms via face to face interviews, the interview form was created by the researchers. The researchers made a detailed literature review and examined the related data collection instruments. In this sense, Kulaksız's (2010) questions regarding the opinions of participants about the contributions of Comenius Program has provided considerable support in the process of preparing the interview questions. Also, the interview form was examined by four experts working in a faculty of education in İzmir in the department of Educational Administration and Supervision and according to expert opinions; the form provided the necessary requirements. The final draft of the interview form consisted of a first part that included personal questions such as gender, subject areas, school type, the status of taking roles in projects and a second part which included five questions about the contributions of EU Projects. Mock interviews were carried out with five teachers working in a school that took part in CMP to determine the problems related to the clarity of questions, time, etc. and necessary corrections were done.

Data Analysis

For the data analysis of the interviews, firstly, audio-taped recordings and written texts were transcribed and then the data were analysed through content analysis. The content analysis was done with NVivo 10 software as the NVivo program paves the way for a detailed analysis and efficient management of the data (Bazeley & Richards, 2000). In the category development process, an inductive way was adopted and the codes were firstly evaluated as a whole. Then, the researchers

discussed on the data and identified the initial codes. After determining the initial codes, the researchers established the main themes and the data were organized under these codes and themes. Themes emerging as a result of the analysis were given in related tables and the expressions that could be used as direct citations were identified and conferred in associated parts in findings. While giving direct citations, each participant was coded according to their subject areas and status of taking active roles or not. Accordingly, the participants were coded like: S1: Turkish and social science subjects, S2: math and science subjects, S3: language subject, S4: class teacher, S5: others, taking active roles in projects: Y and not taking active roles: N.

Validity and Reliability

In order to promote the internal/external validity and reliability of the research in data collection and analysis process, different methods were adopted. For the internal validity of the research, an influential conceptual framework was organized and experts were consulted to give their opinions to form the interview questions. Then, pilot interviews were carried out to promote the clarity and comprehensibility of the interview questions and some alterations were done accordingly. Also, prolonged engagement was adopted during the data collection process and each interview was planned to last as long as possible between 40-60 minutes. For the external validity of the research, thick descriptions and purposive sampling technique were utilized (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). So as to ensure the external and internal reliability of the research, descriptions about the limits, methodology, the working group, data collection and analysis process were all expressed in detail. (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). Also, the reliability of the research was tested with a mock interview that was carried out with five teachers working in a school that took part in CMP (Silverman 2006). As for the reliability of researcher, the data were transferred to the NVivo software programme twice by the same researcher in order to ensure the conformity. Lastly, the themes which emerged as a result of the content analysis were examined by another researcher to compromise on themes.

Findings

The themes of the research were identified as ‘The contributions of CMPs to the institutional development of schools’ and ‘The contributions of CMPs to the development of participants’.

The Contributions of CMPs to the Institutional Development of Schools

The interview results about the contributions of CMPs to the institutional development of schools demonstrated that while most of the teachers asserted that the projects contributed a lot to the development of schools by means of students and teachers’ development, some teachers who did not take active roles in projects alleged that the projects did not contribute to the institutions at all. The following teachers’ opinions illustrate these situations:

“I think these projects contributed us a lot. Our students cooperated with the students abroad and became friends and this was awesome. We, as teachers, shared our experiences and knowledge and it affected our institution in a positive way.” (S3, Y)

“I do not think the project had any important contributions on our school both financially and instructionally. I feel as if we did not carry out a project in our school at all. The teachers in the project team just showed us

the photos of the places they visited. I believe no contribution was observed to the school and the teachers' professional qualities during this period (S₂, N)

The opinions of teachers about the contributions of the CMPs to the institutional development of schools are given in the following table:

Table 2.

The Contributions of CMPs to the Institutional Development of Schools

The contributions to the institutional development of schools
Environmental interaction /Resource support
Municipality
Private sector
Associations
Other schools
Parents
European Dimension
European vision
Cooperation with the schools in Europe
Institutional comparison
School climate
Principal support
Participative decision making
Commitment to the school
Organizational output
School reputation
Positive behavioral change
Physical improvement of schools
Awareness of project
Success
Products as a result of dissemination activities

As seen in Table 2, most of the teachers asserted that the projects increased their schools' interaction with the environment (parents, municipalities, other schools, various associations and institutions from the private sector) and contributed to provide funds for school. However, some of the teachers alleged that they could not find any financial support apart from the one provided by National Agency and therefore they had difficulty in finding enough fund. A teacher's opinions in this regard are as following:

"In terms of providing fund to school, National Agency is already giving some fund but it did not become sufficient and we had difficulty in finding financial support. Parents tried to support with small gifts. We are looking for sponsors nowadays but nobody provides support. As the 20 % of the budget is paid after the project is completed, it becomes harder to find the remaining part and you may have to pay from your own pocket in the first place" (S₄, Y)

In addition to the interaction with the environment, the teachers asserted that the projects added a European dimension to the school; contributed to its cooperation with other schools and provided a European vision therefore, increased school's reputation and prestige by introducing the school to the environment. For example, a teacher remarked:

"During that time, we had parents claiming that we preferred this school as we heard about its project and we were affected. This provided a prestige for our school and a privilege for teachers and students." (S₃, Y)

CMPs, which increased school's reputation and interaction with both the environment and the institutions in Europe, led to some changes in school climate as well and contributed to the school climate with participative decision-making process, supportive principal behavior and as a result, teachers and students became more committed to their schools. However, contrary to the teachers' opinions about supportive principal behavior, some teachers taking active roles in projects asserted that principals did not support the coordinator teachers so much and their supports just consisted of not creating problems in bureaucratic procedures and they were left alone during the process. A teacher expressed that:

"Most of school principals treat the projects as school trips and just think about traveling to places they have not been before. They do not have the mentality to interact with other schools, contribute to the school more and accordingly help the coordinator teachers. They did not have any attempts to enable the coordinators to teach fewer hours while they were busy with the project. We worked with our own efforts staying after school, in our leisure time and made self-sacrifice." (S₅, Y)

Most of the participants claimed that the projects brought about some organizational outcomes such as an awareness of project among all stakeholders, improvement in school's physical appearance, an increase in success and examples of positive student behaviors and some products as a part of dissemination process. Nevertheless, some teachers who did not take active roles in projects conveyed that the projects just contributed to the success of students going abroad and it did not reflect to the school's overall academic success; coordinator teachers embraced only the project but not the school, they did not attend the classes and this caused some discipline problems inside the school and a decrease in school's success. These opinions are reflected by the following comment:

"I experienced lots of difficulty during that time because both the teachers and the principals went abroad and there was a lack of control in school. There were no teachers in classes and this decreased the success of the school. In terms of success, it's disadvantageous rather than advantageous" (S₁, N)

The Contributions of CMPs to the Development of Participants

As to the contributions of CMPs to the development of participants, teachers both taking active roles in projects and those did not state that the projects contributed to the participants' personal/professional, social, cultural development and language learning significantly. The opinions of teachers are given in detail in the following table:

Table 3.

The Contributions of CMP to the Development of Participants

The contributions to the development of participants
Personal/Professional development
Observation and implementation of different methods/techniques
Different point of views
Responsibility
Openness to innovation
Self-confidence
Motivation
European vision
Opportunity to compare
Change in goals
Social development

Teamwork and cooperation
Socialization
Communication within school
Empathy
Interaction with the people in Europe

Cultural development

Awareness of cultural values
Interest in different cultures
Cultural tolerance and sensitiveness
Cultural experience
Cultural interaction
Introduction of one's own culture

Language learning

Motivation to learn languages
Interest in language learning
Language practice
Awareness of the importance of language learning
Self-confidence in learning languages
Change in aims
Language vision

As seen in Table 3, all of the participants stated that the projects contributed to their personal/professional development. Both teachers who participated in projects and those not claimed that the projects gave them the opportunity to observe different method/techniques and good practices and to compare these practices; contributed them to improve different points of views; made them more innovative and open to change by improving their research skills and lastly contributed to the school vision by providing them with a European vision. For example, a teacher remarked:

“As our school is a school for the students with hearing impaired, it was very important to examine and compare the education system, the methods, techniques, equipments they used in Europe. We had the chance to take a closer look at these at firsthand and tried to apply them in our schools. Our project practices had notable contributions in this respect.” (S₃, Y)

Both teachers who participated in the projects and those who did not remark that EU Projects increased their motivation, contributed them to improve their sense of responsibility, self-confidence therefore led to a change in their goals. A teacher expressed that:

“Teachers got motivated more. After finishing the project, they got more committed to their works as they travelled abroad, did something to introduce Turkey and themselves. They were encouraged to join in more projects” (S₅, N)

However, three teachers taking roles as coordinators in the projects stated that the process did not increase their motivation; on the contrary, they lost their motivation. They stated that only the teachers who took active roles were willing to take responsibility; the whole responsibility was on their shoulders, other teachers preferred to stay out of the process and supported themselves in no way. One commented:

“Both lessons and the project required responsibility and this created extra workload. Handling both of them was quite difficult. So, we came through some delays in communication with Europe and our partners did not wish to have Turkish partners anymore.” (S₃, Y)

Almost all of the participants acknowledged that the projects also contributed to the participants' social development. Teachers asserted that the projects contributed to their socialization by making new friends and gave them chances of interaction with the participants

in EU. In addition to improving the interaction and communication internationally, the projects contributed to the interaction within the school by increasing the communication among principals, teachers and students and improved team work and cooperation among them. A teacher's remark on this issue is as follow:

"As we stayed with our principal in the same hotel and went out for dinners, there was a cozy atmosphere and this enabled sincerity among principal, other teachers and students. It made us closer to each other." (S₃, Y)

In contrast to opinions about the contributions of the projects to the interaction within school, some teachers who participated in projects stated that the projects had a negative effect upon the interaction within school, caused some conflicts between teachers and students and were not accepted by the teachers who did not take active roles in projects. Also, some teachers who did not take part in active roles in projects stated that teamwork and cooperation were achieved but this was limited with only project team and it did not expand to the school as a whole. A teacher's following statements were interesting:

"The project was generally carried out by just one person. Although teamwork was a must, the project coordinator did not include us in the process; therefore, we could not demand for participation. So, there was not a team. Just one person adopted the project and said it's my project. She chose the teachers and students who would go abroad and did not consult us" (S₂, N)

One of the interesting findings of the research is that the teachers conveying that the projects did not contribute to interaction within school were mostly teachers working in public schools. Almost all of the students working in private schools stated that there were not any conflicts among teachers and students within school and all teachers and students got along well with each other. The opinions of a teacher working in a private school are reflected by the following comments:

"Even the teachers who are not in the project team tried to do something and everybody worked together. So, both the project advanced rapidly and more favorable results were obtained. Teachers are already working together and helping each other in-school. They have to work together because there are so many projects, researches and tasks that it would be more difficult to attempt to do these individually." (S₂, Y)

In addition to personal/professional and social development, all participants of the research asserted that the projects contributed to their cultural development in various ways. The participants claimed that the projects enabled the participants to have cultural experiences and increased their awareness of different cultures and their own cultural values. A participant expressed the following opinions on this issue:

"Every country organizes cultural trips. You can see all cultural and historical places; you have the chance to see the places you see on TV or Internet before at first hand. Because you can directly follow the daily life of people in Europe, you have the chance to know their cultures, education system and disseminate them the people around you" (S₄, Y)

The projects also gave way the participants to overcome their cultural biases and increase their cultural sensitivity and tolerances by giving them the chance of cultural interaction. One participant asserted this contribution as in the following:

"Teachers' tolerances of different cultures increased and they became more tolerated. They liked the way participants treated themselves abroad; so they started to behave in the same way." (S₂, N)

Finally, all participants admitted that the projects contributed to their language learning to a large extent. The participants stated that 'the projects increased their interests in language learning and changed their attitudes to interact with the people abroad; brought them a language

vision; enabled them to practice in that language by noticing language differences increased their awareness of language learning realizing the must of language learning by experiencing provided a motivation and self-confidence increase in language resulting with a wish to learn other languages apart from English and encouraged the students to study in departments related to language and search for opportunities of studying abroad. One of the comments in this context is following:

“We took our guests to a different city in my car. I had to speak to the guests as there was no English teacher. I realized that I could speak and communicate with them; but at the beginning I was answering their questions hesitating (S₂, N)

In spite of all these contributions in terms of language learning, all language teachers reported that they had some problems as principals, teachers and students did not know English and had communication problems. Language problems that teachers apart from language teachers experienced are reflected in the following statements:

“As we had lack of proficiency in terms of speaking and understanding English and our partners from other countries did not know Turkish, we had difficulty in communicating. We could not socialize enough. In the same way, as the meetings were generally carried out with language teachers, the teachers from other subjects could not benefit from this enough.” (S₂, N).

Discussion

This study set out to determine and understand the ideas of teachers on the contributions of EU Education and Youth Programs in general and CMSs in particular. Taking together, these results indicate that the projects contributed to the personal/professional, social, cultural development and language learning of teachers to a great extent. In terms of personal/professional development, the participants stated that the projects increased their self-confidence, motivation; gave them the opportunity to observe the education systems of other countries and make comparisons among them; improved their vision, professional and research skills. Previous studies have highlighted that the projects contributed to the personal/professional development of both teachers and students (Bozak, Konan & Özdemir, 2016; Cook, 2012; European Commission, 2007; Tallinn, 2007; Yağmurlu, 2012).

In addition to personal/professional development, the projects were also identified to contribute to the social development of participants by increasing their interaction and collaboration with colleagues both in their own schools and other countries and improving their teamwork and cooperation skills. This result is consistent with recent studies on EU projects referring to encouragement of the collaboration and cooperation among colleagues (Bardakçı, 2017; Bardakçı & Aksu, 2019; Diamantopoulou, 2006; European Commission, 2001, 2009, 2011; Gordon, 2001; Gutiérrez-Colón Plana, 2012; National Agency, 2017; Vabo, 2007; Zevgitis & Emvalotis, 2015). However, such claims of the teachers who worked in public schools that the teamwork and cooperation remained limited only with the teachers who took active roles constitute a disadvantage for the sake of both participants and the institutions themselves. One reason of this situation may be the conflicts which were experienced in schools due to the selection of responsible teachers at the beginning of the process. As it was already revealed in this study, the process of selection of the participants may be troublesome for all schools especially for the ones which do not have a healthy organizational interaction and integrity. Once the conflicts caused by the selection of participants are added, the organizational climate and integration of the school may be damaged and the teachers may have a tendency to avoid

being in the project development process and contributing to the project in no sense. Considering the finding that the teachers who were working in private schools had more positive perceptions regarding the contributions of the projects to their social development, it is worth referring to Çoban's findings. In his research Çoban (2007) revealed that the principals and teachers working at private primary and secondary schools have higher rates of perceptions in the dimensions of team spirit, cooperation, effective communication and social harmony compared to the directors and teachers in public schools. Thus, it can be argued that private schools have already a more positive organizational climate and integration with their positive human relations, teamwork and cooperation and the teachers and administrators feel more belonging to school. Therefore it is expected that they adopt the project more and they experience fewer conflicts both generally and during the project development process and thus they contribute to the projects and benefit from the projects more.

As regards the contributions of the CMPs to the language learning of the participants, it was found out that the partnerships provided the participants with a chance to practice in a foreign language, a language vision, an increase in the motivation and self-confidence towards learning a foreign language and awareness of the requisite for learning a foreign language. Furthermore, it was revealed that language teachers have more positive ideas about the contributions of the projects to the development of the institutions and language learning compared to other teachers. As speaking a language provides many opportunities in the initiation and development phases of the projects, these findings are expectable. The studies carried out by Acir (2008), Bahadır (2007), Diamantopoulou (2006), European Commission (2012, 2013), Gutiérrez-Colón Plana (2012), Incik and Yelken (2008), Türkoğlu and Türkoğlu (2006) have also confirmed that language teachers joined in the projects more compared to other teachers and thus had more positive perceptions about the contributions of the projects. However, such challenges as having communication problems and language teachers' being obliged to take charge of the whole task due to lack of language proficiency of the principals and other teachers in the project team can be considered as a drawback in the success of the projects. The importance of language learning and the contributions of the projects to language learning is incontrovertible because with the language skills acquired as a result of the process, the participants have the opportunity to establish new relationships, converse on various topics and this also brings about a deepening of cultural understanding (Jacobone & Moro, 2015). Nevertheless, it must be noted that language teachers' taking part in such projects sometimes adversely affect the language learning goals of these kind of programmes. Because by relying on the competences of language teachers, the other teachers and administrators may cut corners and have a tendency to refrain from the process and lay the burden on language teachers. So, the language learning aspect of the project is undermined and the projects become just some kind of a trip for them (Haspolatlı, 2006; Kulaksız, 2010; Yağmurlu, 2012). Also it can be argued that in addition to affecting language learning adversely, teachers and administrators' relying on language teachers to interact with the participants from other countries may pose a challenge for their cultural development. In fact, it was identified that participants' language incompetency can cause inability to understand the others; thus leading to cultural problems (Ersoy, 2013).

The CMPs, contributing the personal/professional and social development of participants, have also been determined to have major impacts on the cultural developments of participants by providing different cultural experiences, interactions, tolerance towards other cultures and an increase in the cultural awareness towards both their own cultures and other cultures. These results are consistent with the findings of other studies identifying that the programs enable the participants to understand the cultural differences better (European Commission, 2006; Iceland Education and Culture Ministry 2007; Kulaksız, 2010) and to overcome cultural biases (Gordon, 2001; Sirok & Kosmrlj, 2012;

Zevgitis & Emvalotis, 2015). Nevertheless, it must be noted that it was revealed that the participants in both this research and the other researches focusing on Erasmus programme Erasmus experienced difficulties in communicating in a foreign language adapting to cultural differences, feeling cultural bias previously (Ersoy, 2013; Unlu, 2015; Yıldırım & İlin, 2013; Yücel-Seyhan, 2013).

In terms of institutional development, this study demonstrated that the projects contributed to the schools' environmental interaction, reputation, climate; added the school a European dimension; provided the schools with such organizational outcomes as success, positive behavioural change, physical improvement of school, etc. Several studies have also confirmed that the projects' contributed to the institutions in such ways as 'encouraging the European awareness, increasing the reputations of the institutions, improving the school organization (Bardakçı, 2017; European Commission, 2012, Gutiérrez-Colón Plana, 2012; Kassel, 2007; Öztürk, 2015). Furthermore, it was also found out that the projects enabled the schools to foster closer links with the local authorities, companies (CIEP 2012; Diamantopoulou 2006; Zevgitis & Emvalotis, 2015) and establishing school networks with other European schools (CIEP, 2012; Gordon, 2001; National Agency, 2017).

Nevertheless, the findings also revealed that the projects had less impact on the institutional development compared to the personal/professional, social development and language learning of the participants. Such factors as 'having difficulty in finding the necessary resources; perceptions of the projects as if they were trips; problems related to the language proficiency; experiencing conflicts and discipline problems in schools because of the absence of responsible teachers; the projects' remaining limited only with the teachers taking active roles may have influence in the perception of the contributions of the projects to the institutional development of schools in limited levels. These results overlap with such findings derived from the various studies in the literature as the indifference of other teachers and the society to the projects (Ertl, 2003; Gutiérrez Colón-Plana 2012; Zevgitis & Emvalotis, 2015); perceptions of them as trips (Haspolatlı, 2006; Kulaksız, 2010; Yağmurlu, 2012), discipline problems caused by the absence of the responsible teachers (Dilekli, 2008; Gutiérrez-Colón Plana, 2012), not having administrative support to the projects (European Commission, 2013; Zevgitis & Emvalotis, 2015), the insufficiency of the resources granted by the National Agency (Deloitte & Touche, 2000; Ertl, 2003). It is noteworthy to identify that most of the teachers expressing about the negative impacts of the projects are the ones who did not take active roles in projects. Accordingly, Haspolatlı (2006) found out in his study that teachers who did not take active roles in the preparation phase of the projects were not effective to contribute the project and did not accept the project at all. It can thus be suggested that awareness of the teachers taking active roles in projects of the whole process thus adopting the projects more may influence the perceptions of those teachers.

In the light of the results above, it can be argued that the EU Education and Youth Programs in general and Comenius projects in particular seem to be perceived as highly positive and contribute to participants to a large extent. It is believed that the projects contribute to an increase in the participants' self-efficacy and the efficacy beliefs providing them with the experience which is the most significant factor determining one's self-efficacy" (Jacobone & Moro, 2015, p. 312). Also, having the opportunity to live with people from different cultures and to communicate with different languages enables the participants to improve their social and intercultural competence which is considered as a necessary skill to live in today's global communities (Fritz, Möllenberg & Chen 2002).

In addition to all this, it is noteworthy to state that there are other kinds of programmes which serve the same purposes despite such factors as differences of target group, program types, timing, etc. One of these programmes is Erasmus which is for higher education. Similar to the contributions of

Comenius Projects, it was revealed that the Erasmus Programme contributed to the internalization of higher education (Aba, 2013), personal and cultural development of participants and language learning of them; however, the participants experienced similar challenges (Ersoy, 2013; Unlu, 2015; Yıldırım & Yücel-Seyhan, 2013). All in all, it can be argued that although there are minor differences between the programmes, most of the EU Education and Youth Programmes serve similar aims and have similar problems and contribute to Turkish education system to a large extent.

Suggestions

Although this research is about Comenius program which was expired in 2014, the findings of this research support strong recommendation to both decision makers and the schools which are planning to apply School Partnership Programmes; thus it is expected to contribute to the relevant topic as well. In this sense, regarding the findings of this research, it is clearly understood from the participants' views that some structural problems such as the programs' being limited with just responsible teachers and not being accepted by the whole institution; the lack of financial support and inadequacy of funds; bureaucratic obstacles have remained the same and these problems also stand for main obstacles for both the development of institutions and participants. Thus, in order to enable these projects to contribute more to both the institutions and participants, both the factors conveyed by the participants as problems and structural problems which have been referred regarding EU Education and Youth Programs from the very beginning should be taken into consideration. Also, considering the findings regarding that the participants were less convinced on the contributions of the projects to the development of institutions, it seems practical to provide some suggestions: As it is important to include all school members in the process both to enable all school members to adopt the project and avoid of the conflicts due to the selection of responsible participants, the school administration should attempt to identify the clear criteria to choose the participants and give each member of the school responsibilities in his/her competences in an attempt to enable all school members to benefit from the projects equally. In order to increase the support of school principals and other teachers, it's significant to provide school principals and teachers with in-service training about the aims, content of these projects and problems that can stemmed from bureaucratic and technical. Also, providing substitute teachers or paying extra fees to the teachers attending the classes in the absence of responsible teachers are recommended to avoid discipline problems. The inadequacy of funds allocated for the projects appears as another problem. Within this context, it is suggested that the fund left for the programs is to be increased. Lastly, according to Arkan and Gürleyen (2016), internalization and the European dimension is more visible in higher education compared with school education today. In this sense, taking the findings of Aba (2013), Yıldırım and İlin (2013) into consideration that Erasmus programme contributes to the internalization of institutions and participants to a large extent, good practices of Erasmus programme should be followed and adapted to school level in order to enable the internalization of schools and increase the contributions at macro level.

Limitations and further research

The greatest limitation of this study is that it is about Comenius program which is expired in 2014. Within this context, it is suggested that similar researches are carried out with the new programme "Erasmus+" so that differences between programmes and pros and cons of previous and current programmes could be identified. Also, although the qualitative method used in this study provided a

profound picture of the views of teachers about the contributions of CMPs, its limited sample constitutes an impediment to generalize it to all teachers in Turkey and the whole participants of the research. In this sense, the reader is invited to judge the applicability of the findings and conclusions to other samples. Also, it is suggested to expand the sample size including principals, students and families and the schools which did not carry out an EU Project as well for further studies. In order to develop a full picture, additional studies are needed on what the impacts of these programs on schools and the leadership of school administrators as well as how it affects teaching, learning, and student success. Lastly, so as to make comparisons between EU Education and Youth Programmes, studies examining the differences between the programmes developed for different target groups such as vocational education, higher education, adult education, etc should be carried out.

The role and competency of the researchers

Both of the researchers have been in school settings as a teacher and administrator and they have had the opportunity to observe the experiences gained through EU Projects. Also, the researchers had the chance to benefit from both Comenius and Erasmus programme and participated in these programmes. Completing their PhD in the department of Educational Administration, the researchers both carried out qualitative, quantitative and review studies regarding EU Lifelong Learning Policies and EU Education and Youth Programmes and developed competence in qualitative method. In this research, the researchers were practitioners and they went to schools where the study was carried out and collected data themselves; so they had the chance to observe the atmosphere of the schools and took notes in order to use them in data analysis process. While collecting data, they attempted to identify the experiences and views of participants and brought individual experiences into words. The researchers worked in collaboration with each other in the entire research process within the framework of scientific ethical principles.

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