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Evaluating International Student Experiences in a Short-Term Mobility Education: A Case of the Delightful Istanbul Program

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ABSTRACT

Short-term international academic programs are increasingly adopted to promote global engagement in higher education; however, student experiences within these initiatives remain underexplored. This study evaluates the academic perceptions of 129 international students who participated in the 2024 Delightful Istanbul Summer Program at Istanbul Aydin University. Data were collected using the validated Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ), and analyses conducted with SPSS confirmed high internal

reliability (α=.80-.92). Among CEQ dimensions, Good Teaching received high ratings, particularly from Health Sciences students (M=4.63), while Emphasis on Independence received lower ratings, particularly from STEM students (M=3.66). No significant gender differences emerged. Health Sciences students scored significantly higher than both STEM and Social Sciences students in Generic Skills (p=.004). Field-of-study differences were also found in Good Teaching (p=.039) and Overall Satisfaction (p=.003), with Health Sciences reporting the highest means. Across course types, significant variations appeared in teaching quality (p<.01), skill development (p<.001), independence (p<.05), and overall satisfaction (p=.002), favoring STEM and Health Sciences courses. Regression analysis identified Good Teaching (β=.50, p<.001) and Generic Skills (β=.21, p=.003) as significant predictors of overall satisfaction, explaining 57% of the variance. These findings highlight the value of well-structured, interdisciplinary short-term programs in enhancing student engagement and learning outcomes.

Keywords: Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ), interdisciplinary learning outcomes, international students, pedagogical strategies, short-term mobility programs

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INTRODUCTION

International student mobility has become a central component of higher education internationalization. Research in international education distinguishes between long-term mobility, which typically spans a semester or an academic year, and short-term mobility, which typically lasts a few weeks. Long-term programs provide deeper cultural immersion, sustained opportunities for language acquisition, and integration into academic and social communities (King & Ruiz-Gelices, 2003; Dwyer, 2004). Such programs support progressive competence development and professional networking but require substantial financial, temporal, and logistical resources, which may limit accessibility (Salisbury et al., 2011).

Conversely, short-term programs are more accessible and flexible, enabling students with financial, familial, or academic constraints to participate (Lewis & Niesenbaum, 2005; Soria & Troisi, 2014). Existing literature indicates that domestic students' engagement with international peers correlates with multidimensional learning outcomes encompassing general education, leadership development, and intellectual growth (Luo & Jamieson-Drake, 2013). Short-term mobility frameworks have the potential to foster intensive, experiential, and interdisciplinary learning that integrates academic rigour with cultural

engagement. Well-designed short-term programs can enhance intercultural awareness, teamwork, and overall engagement (Behrnd & Porzelt, 2012). However, their condensed timeframe can constrain linguistic development and deeper cultural adaptation (Lewis & Niesenbaum, 2005; Volet & Jones, 2012). Prior research has also highlighted recurring challenges in international student mobility, such as language barriers, financial pressures, and cultural adjustment, underscoring the importance of both pre-departure and on-site support (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019; Demir et al., 2025).

While long-term programs excel in depth and sustained integration, short-term programs offer greater breadth, accessibility, and intensity. Both models contribute meaningfully to the internationalization of higher education, yet short-term programs remain relatively underexplored despite their increasing role in promoting equitable and diversified mobility pathways (UNESCO, 2019; European Commission, 2020; Hong et al., 2025). Understanding students' experiences in such programs is essential for assessing their educational value and for informing the design of future mobility initiatives.

Istanbul Aydin University's Delightful Istanbul Program (IAU DIP) is a short-term, intensive, and interdisciplinary initiative offered annually since 2014. The two-week summer program offers 10 courses for undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students, as well as recent international graduates. A minimum of B2-level English proficiency (CEFR) is required. Notably, eight of the ten courses are delivered in a blended online mobility format that combines synchronous online learning with in-person instruction (Delightful Istanbul, 2024). The program attracts participants from multiple countries and disciplines, including Economics and Administrative Sciences, Engineering, Fine Arts, Medicine, and Turkish Language and Culture. Situated in Istanbul, a city rich in cultural heritage, the program integrates academic rigour with experiential learning, fostering both cognitive and interpersonal development. This model aligns with research demonstrating that short-term international programs can effectively promote intercultural awareness and student engagement (Anderson et al., 2006; Behrnd & Porzelt, 2012; Dwyer, 2004).

The aim of this study is to evaluate the academic experiences of international students participating in short-term programs, drawing on data from the IAU DIP. Specifically, the study examines students' perceptions across the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) dimensions and investigates whether CEQ scores differ by gender, field of study (Social Sciences, STEM, and Health Sciences), or course type (Business & Management, STEM & Health Sciences, Cultural Studies & Humanities). Additionally, the study identifies which CEQ dimensions most strongly predict overall satisfaction and explores how international students evaluate each CEQ component within a short-term context.

We hypothesize that international students will perceive their academic experiences in short-term programs positively across all CEQ dimensions. CEQ scores are expected not to differ significantly by gender but may vary according to students' field of study and course type. Among the CEQ dimensions, Good Teaching and Clear Goals and Standards are anticipated to be the strongest predictors of overall satisfaction. Furthermore, short-term programs are expected to yield higher ratings for Generic Skills and Emphasis on Independence, thereby enhancing students' autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Collectively, these hypotheses aim to evaluate how short-term international programs contribute to academic experience and the development of global competencies.

This study is framed by Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which comprises the constructs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000), together with

Deardorff's model of intercultural competence (2006). Although the CEQ was not explicitly designed to test SDT, conceptual links can be drawn emphasis on Independence aligns with autonomy, whereas good teaching and Clear Goals and Standards relate to competence. The CEQ, however, does not directly capture the construct of relatedness. Prior research indicates four relevant thematic areas. First one is the role of program length in study abroad outcomes (Dwyer, 2004). Second is the intercultural outcomes and participant characteristics (Behrnd & Porzelt, 2012; Salisbury, Paulsen, & Pascarella, 2011). Third, the use and validation of perception tools such as the CEQ, including in online contexts (Richardson & Price, 2003; Wilson, Lizzio, & Ramsden, 1997). Lastly, fourth, insights from experiential and blended learning approaches that inform short, intensive formats (Kolb, 1984; Alammary, 2019). CEQ-based evaluations in intensive, multicultural, short-term exchanges remain limited. This study addresses this gap by employing the CEQ to capture students' perceived course experiences within such programs.

In this context, academic experience is defined as the multidimensional set of perceptions students hold regarding teaching quality, clarity of expectations, assessment fairness, workload balance, generic skill development, and autonomy within a specific course or program (Ramsden, 1991; Richardson, 1994). Academic experience was operationalized using the CEQ, rated on a five-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree), with higher scores indicating more positive perceptions. The CEQ comprises six subscales: Good Teaching, Clear Goals and Standards, Generic Skills, Appropriate Assessment, Appropriate Workload, and Emphasis on Independence. Each subscale reflects a distinct aspect of academic experience, and the CEQ has been widely applied and validated across diverse educational contexts (Wilson, Lizzio, & Ramsden, 1997). Lizzio, Wilson, and Simons (2002) demonstrated that students' perceptions of the learning environment predict both achievement-related (hard) and satisfaction-related (soft) outcomes, directly and through approaches to study.

METHOD

Participant Selection and Research Procedure

This research was conducted during the summer of 2024 as part of Istanbul Aydin University's Delightful Istanbul Program. The study involved 129 international students who participated in the program. Most courses (8 out of 10) were delivered through Blended Online Mobility under the Erasmus+ framework, integrating digital learning with face-to-face instruction.

Initially, the study targeted 198 students enrolled in the Delightful Istanbul Program. The Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) was administered to 162 students who were present during the closing ceremony on 1 August 2024. Following data screening, questionnaires with missing informed consent, incomplete responses, or double-marked answers were excluded, resulting in a final analytic sample of 129 valid and fully completed questionnaires. These 129 cases constituted the dataset used for all subsequent analyses. The sample included 80 females (62%) and 49 males (38%) participants, representing different educational levels: 115 undergraduate students (89.1%), 11 master's

students or graduates (8.5%), and 3 doctoral students or graduates (2.3%). Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 45 years, with a mean of 21.8 years. The mean age among male participants was 21.6 years, whereas female participants averaged 21.9 years. The cohort demonstrated significant international diversity, representing 29 countries. The largest group came from Pakistan (n=33), followed by Indonesia and Germany (each n=13), and China (n=11). Moderate representation was observed from Romania (n=7), Latvia (n=6), and both Hong Kong and Kazakhstan (each n=5). Russia (n=4) and several other countries including South Korea, Albania, Singapore, and Georgia (each n=3), contributed multiple students. India, the United States, Hungary, and Ireland each had two participants, while the remaining 12 countries were represented by a single student. Consistent with previous research, participation spanned multiple academic disciplines, though representation varied across fields (Salisbury, Paulsen, & Pascarella, 2011; Lewis & Niesenbaum, 2005). The program offered a diverse range of courses designed to provide specialised knowledge while fostering international collaboration. The curriculum included Brand Management (n=9), Digital Marketing (n=19), and Integrated Marketing Communications (n=16), forming a strong cluster in business and marketing. Social Sciences and Political Studies were represented by International Organisations and World Politics (n=14), while technical decision-making skills were addressed through Multi-Criteria Decision Making (n=14). Cultural components included Exploration of Turkish Art through Museums (n=16) and The Taste of Istanbul and Anatolian Food Culture (n=6). The science track featured Genetics and Medical Biotechnology (n=9) and Neuroscience (n=18). Finally, language development was supported through the Turkish Language Program (n=8), offered by the Istanbul Aydin University Turkish Language Teaching Application and Research Centre (TÖMER).

Data Collection

The study employed a quantitative research design using comparative and descriptive analyses. The Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) served as the primary measurement instrument. The CEQ is a widely recognized tool for evaluating students' perceptions of their learning environments in higher education. It has been extensively examined and validated by Wilson, Lizzio, and Ramsden (1997), whose work significantly contributed to the instrument's refinement. Since then, the CEQ has become a key instrument in educational assessment across diverse cultural and institutional contexts.

The CEQ comprises 36 + 1 items, distributed across six subscales: Good Teaching (8 items), Clear Goals and Standards (5 items), Generic Skills (6 items), Appropriate Assessment (6 items), Appropriate Workload (5 items), and Emphasis on Independence (6 items), along with one additional item measuring Overall Satisfaction. Each item is rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

The questionnaire has demonstrated strong reliability and versatility across numerous studies, including cultural adaptations and program-level evaluations in Hong Kong (Law & Meyer, 2011), Malaysia (Thien & Ong, 2016), and Australia (Lyon & Hendry, 2002). Further research by Lizzio, Wilson, and Simons (2002) underscored the CEQ's value in exploring the relationship between students' perceptions of the learning environment and their academic outcomes, making it a valuable tool for both theoretical inquiry and institutional improvement in higher education.

During data preparation, several CEQ items were reverse coded following established methodological guidelines to ensure that higher scores uniformly reflected more positive perceptions. Specifically, recoding procedures were applied based on the standard scoring key of the instrument (Wilson, Lizzio, & Ramsden, 1997). While Ali and Mohd Dodeen (2021) discuss a short form (CEQ23), the present study employed the full 36 + 1 item version. A similar methodological approach regarding the handling of reverse-coded items for construct validity is also indicated by Chakrabarty, Richardson, and Sen (2016), although item counts may vary across different versions. The recoding process ensured consistent interpretation across all items, such that higher scores uniformly reflected more positive perceptions of the learning environment across all CEQ subscales. For data analysis and processing, statistical analysis software tools were used. IBM SPSS Statistics 19 (IBM, 2010) served as the primary platform for conducting reliability tests, descriptive statistics, and comparative analyses.

RESULTS

Prior to conducting the primary analyses, reliability testing was performed to evaluate the internal consistency of all CEQ subscales. As presented in Table 1, the results demonstrated satisfactory reliability across all dimensions. Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from .807 (Clear Goals and Standards) to .920 (Generic Skills), exceeding the recommended threshold of .70. Item-total correlations and alpha-if-item-deleted statistics confirmed that each item contributed appropriately to its corresponding subscale. Following the reliability assessment, mean scores were calculated for each subscale to generate composite variables for subsequent analyses. These composite scores were treated as dependent variables in a series of one-way ANOVA tests, conducted to examine potential differences across three key grouping variables: Gender, Field of study (students' primary academic discipline at their home institution), and Course type (the specific course category in which students were enrolled during the Delightful Istanbul Program). Each grouping variable was analyzed separately to identify variations in students' perceptions of their academic experiences. Where omnibus ANOVA tests indicated statistically significant effects, Tukey's HSD post hoc tests were performed to determine the specific group differences underlying the overall significance.

Table 1: Reliability Analysis of CEQ Scales

Scale	n items	Cronbach's α	Range of α if item deleted
Good Teaching	8	.858	.820-.916
Generic Skills	6	.920	.898-.912
Clear Goals & Standards	5	.807	.758-.787
Appropriate Assessment	6	.860	.814-.861
Appropriate Workload	5	.824	.737-.876
Emphasis on Independence	6	.822	.762-.839

Gender differences were examined using independent-samples t-tests (see Table 2) to determine whether male and female students perceived their academic experiences differently. The analyses revealed no statistically significant differences between male and female participants across any CEQ dimension.

Female students reported slightly higher mean scores on Good Teaching and Clear Goals and Standards, indicating marginally more positive perceptions of instructional quality and course organization. Conversely, male students showed somewhat higher mean scores on the Generic Skills scale, suggesting a slightly stronger perception of transferable skill development. However, these differences were small and did not reach statistical significance. The remaining dimensions, appropriate assessment, appropriate workload, and emphasis on independence, displayed even smaller variations between gender groups, with nearly identical mean values. Overall, these findings suggest that the Delightful Istanbul Program provided an equitable learning environment that effectively transcended gender-based differences. The absence of significant gender effects aligns with recent research in international education, which indicates that pedagogical quality and student engagement are more strongly influenced by instructional design and disciplinary context than by gender (e.g., Soria & Troisi, 2014).

Table 2. Gender Based t-Tests Results

Scale	p value	t-Statistic	Male Mean	Male SD	Female Mean	Female SD
Good Teaching	.591	-.538	4.252	.726	4.323	.725
Generic Skills	.243	1.172	4.017	.773	3.791	1.2
Clear Goals & Standards	.35	-.936	3.869	.764	4.015	.908
Appropriate Assessment	.456	-.746	3.768	1.078	3.9	.897
Appropriate Workload	.959	.05	3.873	.889	3.865	.937
Emphasis on Independence	.724	.353	3.802	.85	3.743	.959
Overall Satisfaction	.297	1.046	4.489	.793	4.325	.91

Following the gender-based analyses, a one-way ANOVA was conducted (see Table 3) to examine potential differences across students' fields of study, acknowledging that participants represented diverse academic backgrounds. Students were categorized into three disciplinary groups: Social Sciences, STEM, and Health Sciences.

The results revealed significant variations in how students from different academic backgrounds experienced the program. Statistically significant differences emerged for the Good Teaching, Generic Skills, and Overall Satisfaction dimensions.

For Good Teaching, the ANOVA yielded a significant result, and Tukey's HSD post hoc tests confirmed that Health Sciences students scored significantly higher than STEM students ($Q=4.06$, $p=.013$). This finding suggests that students from health-related fields perceived the instructional approaches as particularly effective, possibly due to their familiarity with interactive and case-based teaching methods that are common in health education.

The most pronounced difference was observed in Generic Skills development, with the analysis demonstrating strong statistical significance. Post hoc Tukey HSD

comparisons showed that Health Sciences students scored significantly higher than both Social Sciences (Q=4.69, p=.003) and STEM students (Q=4.63, p=.004). This indicates that Health Sciences students perceived greater opportunities for developing transferable competencies within the program. Their academic training, which often integrates theoretical knowledge with practical application, may have enabled them to more effectively recognize and engage with skill-development opportunities.

Another significant difference was observed for Overall Satisfaction, which exhibited the strongest group effect among all dimensions analyzed. Post hoc Tukey HSD results confirmed that Health Sciences students reported significantly higher satisfaction than Social Sciences students (Q=4.99, p=.002). This pattern suggests that the program resonated most strongly with students from health disciplines, who may have found its interdisciplinary and intensive nature well aligned with their educational expectations.

No significant differences were observed for Clear Goals and Standards, Appropriate Assessment, Appropriate Workload, or Emphasis on Independence, indicating that the program's structural and organizational features were perceived consistently across all academic disciplines.

Table 3. Field of Study Based ANOVA Results

Scale	Social Sciences (n=71) M (SD)	STEM (n=36) M (SD)	Health Sciences (n=22) M (SD)	F(2,126)	p
Good Teaching	4.28 (0.75)	4.13 (0.76)	4.63 (0.46)	3.33	.039
Clear Goals & Standards	3.99 (0.87)	3.77 (0.84)	4.19 (0.83)	1.77	.175
Generic Skills	3.73 (1.15)	3.75 (0.90)	4.55 (0.73)	5.78	.004
Appropriate Assessment	3.93 (0.91)	3.73 (0.91)	3.79 (1.22)	0.59	.557
Appropriate Workload	3.88 (0.88)	3.74 (0.83)	4.03 (1.17)	0.66	.516
Emphasis on Independence	3.69 (0.94)	3.66 (0.85)	4.17 (0.90)	2.61	.077
Overall Satisfaction	4.20 (1.01)	4.44 (0.65)	4.91 (0.29)	6.21	.003

The analysis by course type revealed more pronounced differences (see Table 4) than those observed across fields of study. Courses were grouped into three categories: Business & Management, STEM & Health Sciences, and Cultural Studies & Humanities. This classification enabled an examination of how the specific courses undertaken during the Delightful Istanbul Program influenced students' perceptions, independent of their primary academic disciplines.

Significant effects emerged across multiple CEQ dimensions. The Good Teaching scale demonstrated substantial variation among course types, with STEM & Health Sciences courses showing the highest mean scores. Tukey's HSD post hoc tests confirmed these differences, indicating that STEM & Health Sciences courses received significantly higher ratings than both Business & Management (Q=4.14, p=.011) and Cultural Studies & Humanities (Q=4.29, p=.008). This pattern suggests that the pedagogical approaches employed in STEM and Health Sciences courses resonated particularly well with students in the short-term, intensive format.

The Generic Skills dimension exhibited the strongest differences among all areas analyzed. Post hoc comparisons again confirmed that STEM & Health Sciences courses scored significantly higher than both Business & Management (Q=4.37, p=.007) and Cultural Studies & Humanities (Q=6.56, p<.001), with the latter showing the largest effect. This consistent pattern supports the interpretation that these course types offered greater opportunities for autonomous or self-directed learning, although such mechanisms were not directly measured in this study.

Emphasis on Independence also varied significantly across course types, again favouring STEM & Health Sciences. Post hoc Tukey HSD tests indicated that these courses placed significantly greater emphasis on independent learning than Cultural Studies & Humanities (Q=3.80, p=.022), whereas Business & Management courses did not differ significantly from either group.

Table 4. Course Type Based ANOVA Results

Scale	Business & Management (n=58) M (SD)	STEM & Health Sciences (n=27) M (SD)	Cultural Studies & Humanities (n=44) M (SD)	F(2,126)	p
Good Teaching	4.20 (0.74)	4.67 (0.36)	4.19 (0.80)	4.86	.009
Clear Goals & Standards	3.98 (0.88)	4.19 (0.73)	3.79 (0.88)	1.83	.164
Generic Skills	3.85 (1.10)	4.55 (0.51)	3.50 (1.08)	9.28	<.001
Appropriate Assessment	3.81 (0.94)	3.76 (1.14)	3.96 (0.90)	0.47	.629
Appropriate Workload	3.87 (0.94)	3.87 (1.07)	3.86 (0.80)	0.00	.997
Emphasis on Independence	3.70 (0.95)	4.16 (0.75)	3.61 (0.92)	3.39	.037
Overall Satisfaction	4.31 (0.90)	4.89 (0.32)	4.18 (0.95)	6.47	.002

Overall Satisfaction followed a similar trend, with STEM & Health Sciences courses generating the highest satisfaction ratings. Post hoc analyses confirmed that satisfaction scores for STEM & Health Sciences courses were significantly higher than those for Business & Management (Q=4.33, p=.008) and Cultural Studies & Humanities (Q=5.29, p<.001). This comprehensive satisfaction advantage suggests that students found these courses particularly well-suited to the short-term international program format.

No significant differences were identified for Clear Goals and Standards, Appropriate Assessment, or Appropriate Workload, indicating that the program maintained consistent structural organization and expectations across all course categories.

Finally, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted (see Table 5) to determine which CEQ dimensions significantly predicted overall satisfaction with the program. The six CEQ subscales were entered simultaneously as predictor variables.

The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F(6, 122)=26.79$, $p<.001$, $R^2=.57$, adjusted $R^2=.55$, indicating that 57% of the variance in overall satisfaction was explained by the CEQ dimensions.

Analysis of individual predictors revealed that Good Teaching ($\beta=.50$, $p<.001$) and Generic Skills ($\beta=.21$, $p=.003$) emerged as significant positive predictors of overall satisfaction. Contrary to the study's hypothesis, Clear Goals and Standards did not significantly predict satisfaction. The remaining dimensions, Appropriate Assessment, Appropriate Workload, and Emphasis on Independence, also failed to reach statistical significance.

Table 5. Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Overall Satisfaction

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	.71	.34	-	2.12	.036
Good Teaching	.50	.11	.50	4.46	<.001
Clear Goals & Standards	.03	.09	.03	0.33	.742
Generic Skills	.21	.07	.21	3.01	.003
Appropriate Assessment	-.10	.07	-.10	-1.29	.199
Appropriate Workload	.12	.07	.12	1.59	.113
Emphasis on Independence	.13	.09	.13	1.47	.143

DISCUSSION

This study examined the experiences of international students participating in the Delightful Istanbul short-term educational program, yielding several notable findings. Reliability analyses (Cronbach's α) demonstrated strong internal consistency for the CEQ subscales, consistent with prior validations (Law & Meyer, 2011; Thien & Ong, 2016).

Regression analysis revealed that Good Teaching ($\beta=.50$, $p<.001$) and Generic Skills ($\beta=.21$, $p=.003$) were significant positive predictors of overall satisfaction, whereas Clear Goals and Standards was not ($\beta=.03$, $p=.742$). This indicates that, in short and intensive formats, students' satisfaction depends more on perceived teaching quality and transferable skill development than on structural goal clarity. The non-significance of Clear Goals and Standards contradicts the initial hypothesis and may suggest that, within short-term programs, immediate experiences of engaging teaching and skill acquisition outweigh the importance of predefined goals and standards. The model's explanatory power ($R^2=.57$)

further demonstrates that these factors capture key components of student satisfaction, with Good Teaching emerging as the strongest predictor among all CEQ dimensions.

No significant gender differences were identified, suggesting a gender-neutral learning environment. This aligns with recent findings indicating minimal gender-based differences in competence measures and academic outcomes (Pramila-Savukoski et al., 2024). However, disciplinary differences were observed. Health Sciences students reported significantly higher scores on the Generic Skills scale than both STEM and Social Sciences students, consistent with the results of Pramila-Savukoski et al. (2024). While the present study did not investigate specific mechanisms, such outcomes may stem from the competency-based and integrative nature of many health-related curricula.

Higher Generic Skills scores among Health Sciences students are consistent with evidence that health programs are increasingly structured around competency-based education (CBE) models that bridge the gap between theory and practice by fostering critical thinking, communication, and adaptability (Ten Cate & Scheele, 2007). Although many curricula are still transitioning to fully competency-based designs, existing frameworks already integrate elements that promote applied learning and reflection. These competencies are not only essential for clinical practice but are also increasingly valued across sectors worldwide. Educational programs that move beyond passive learning formats help build the skilled and adaptive workforce needed in the digital era by fostering collaboration, problem-solving, and decision-making. Although such mechanisms were not directly examined in this study, future research could explore how short-term international programs align with contemporary professional and sectoral expectations.

Comparisons across course types revealed that students enrolled in STEM and Health Sciences courses consistently rated Good Teaching, Generic Skills, and Emphasis on Independence higher than those enrolled in Business or Cultural Studies courses. The elevated ratings for Good Teaching may relate to the interactive and blended instructional approaches used in Erasmus+ frameworks, though the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference. This interpretation aligns with Alammary (2019), who found that blended learning formats enhance teacher-student interaction and instructional clarity. Similarly, the higher scores for STEM and Health Sciences courses may reflect the inclusion of interactive or applied activities typical of problem- or case-based learning strategies, which are known to promote engagement and independent inquiry (Hmelo-Silver, 2004). In contrast, Business and Cultural Studies courses may rely more heavily on lecture-based methods, which participants in short-term formats could perceive as less dynamic or participatory.

The program's interdisciplinary structure and multicultural student body provide a valuable lens for examining how academic diversity shapes learning experiences. Although the present study found consistent perceptions regarding Clear Goals and Assessment across disciplines, future research should explore how intergroup collaboration and peer diversity contribute to cognitive and intercultural development, as proposed by Deardorff (2006).

Students scored relatively lower on the Emphasis on Independence scale, particularly across different course types. This may reflect the participants' diverse cultural and academic backgrounds. Previous research suggests that students from collectivist cultures tend to prefer structured guidance over autonomous learning environments (Hofstede, 2001; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 2012; Meyer, 2014). Given that many participants

were from Asian and Eastern European countries, such cultural orientations may have influenced their perceptions of independence within the program. Future iterations could address this by scaffolding independent tasks with clearer expectations and culturally responsive support strategies (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The relatively consistent ratings for Clear Goals, Appropriate Assessment, and Appropriate Workload suggest that the program maintained standardized and coherent instructional practices across its diverse course offerings.

Despite these strengths, several limitations should be noted. First, the CEQ is a self-report instrument, and responses may be influenced by participants' expectations or cultural backgrounds. Second, while the CEQ is validated across multiple contexts, it may not fully capture the nuanced, context-specific experiences of highly diverse international cohorts. Third, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causal relationships or measure changes over time. Moreover, the survey was administered immediately following the closing ceremony, when fatigue or halo effects may have influenced responses. Allowing a short delay and administering the instrument online could help mitigate these biases and improve response reliability in future studies. The relatively small sample sizes in certain subgroups, such as Health Sciences, also constrain the generalizability of findings.

Future research should consider longitudinal or mixed methods designs, integrating qualitative data from interviews or focus groups to explore how students adapt to diverse academic and cultural environments. Comparative studies across multiple international programs could identify both shared and context-specific patterns, supporting the development of robust frameworks for evaluating cross-cultural educational experiences. Further investigation of factors such as prior international exposure, instructional methodologies, and program design would yield deeper insight into the long-term academic and professional impacts of short-term international education.

IMPLICATIONS

This study provides a comprehensive evaluation of international student experiences within the Delightful Istanbul short-term academic mobility program, organized by Istanbul Aydin University. Using the validated Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) provides valuable insights into teaching quality, learning outcomes, and discipline-specific variations in student perceptions.

Findings indicate that students evaluated the program positively across most dimensions, particularly with respect to teaching quality and skill development. No significant gender-based differences were observed, suggesting equitable learning experiences. However, both the field of study and the course type influenced perceptions. Students enrolled in STEM and Health Sciences courses reported significantly higher scores on Good Teaching, Generic Skills, and Emphasis on Independence, and expressed greater overall satisfaction. Similarly, students from Health Sciences disciplines rated Good Teaching and Generic Skills more favorably than their counterparts from STEM and Social Sciences, resulting in the highest overall satisfaction levels.

By contrast, structural dimensions Clear Goals, Appropriate Assessment, and Appropriate Workload showed little variation across groups, indicating consistent course

organization and assessment practices throughout the program. Together with the regression results, which revealed Good Teaching and Generic Skills as the strongest predictors of overall satisfaction, while Clear Goals was not significant, these outcomes highlight the CEQ's value as an evaluative tool for short, intensive international programs.

Overall, the findings underscore the importance of discipline-sensitive instructional design and pedagogical strategies that promote engagement, skill acquisition, and learner autonomy. As institutional investment in short-term mobility continues to expand, universities should aim to strengthen both the academic and intercultural components of these initiatives. Future evaluations adopting longitudinal and mixed-methods approaches are recommended to capture the sustained and context-specific impacts of such programs on students' academic development, intercultural competence, and global readiness.

Author contributions: CRediT

All authors contributed equally to the following roles: Conceptualization, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Software, Validation, Writing - Original Draft, and Writing - Review & Editing.

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This study was approved by the Istanbul Aydin University Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee (Meeting Number: 2024/08). All participants provided informed consent prior to inclusion in the study.

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Declaration on the use of AI in the writing process

The article uses artificial intelligence tools solely for grammar and language refinement. No AI tools were used for content creation, data analysis, interpretation of results or drawing conclusions. The final manuscript was fully reviewed and approved by the authors, and the use of AI tools complied with ethical standards and academic integrity guidelines.

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