



Geography department students' views on European Union projects in Turkey

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to discover what students in the geography department at the Faculty of Arts and Letters thought about the European Union (EU) projects. In the study, a case study pattern, one of the qualitative research methods, was adopted. In the creation of the research group, the maximum diversity sampling process, which is one of the purposeful sampling methods, was chosen. The participants were composed of fourteen volunteer students at the Department of Geography in state a university in Turkey. The data were collected via an interview form developed by the researcher. The form consisted of nine semi-structured questions. The obtained data were analyzed through descriptive statistics and content analysis via coding. The results revealed that the participants were willing to take part in the project, and were excited to conduct a study on this topic, but they didn't know much about the EU projects. Some of them who believed in the importance of the projects for their future career, were of the opinion that a compulsory course on project development should be offered, while some others recommended an elective course on that subject. In addition, they put forward suggestions for the proliferation, dissemination, and success of the EU projects in competitions or through different platforms.

Keywords: Geography department, the European Union projects, project development, student opinions

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1. Introduction

The European Union (EU) was founded in 1951 on the foundation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) to create a common market for coal and steel on the continent (Ministry of Culture and Tourism [KTB], 2021). The name of the European Union started to be used with the Treaty of Maastricht, which entered into force on 7 February 1992. While the European Union consists primarily of six founding members such as France, Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg, it has

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become a large union of 27 states with the countries that joined and left it in later enlargement periods.

Turkey's journey to join the EU dates back nearly 60 years. Turkey's adventure begins with the Ankara Agreement, which was signed on September 12, 1963, and entered into force on December 1, 1964 (Directorate for EU Affairs [DEUA], 2021a). The goal of this treaty is for Turkey to become a full member of the EU. However, little progress has been made in recent years.

While the European Union has been expanding for many years, it has recently begun to take steps toward internal integration and future action and development as a single society. One of these studies is the development of projects that will ensure cooperation, harmonization, and integration between European societies in the context of economic equality. For this purpose, project platforms requiring inter-community partnership in the fields of education, culture, art, sports, agriculture, industry, trade, environment, social responsibility, and local government have been established and people's participation in these projects has been encouraged (Economic Development Foundation [İKV], 2016). Since Turkey is a candidate country for the EU, it has achieved a significant participation rate, particularly in the field of education, as it has the right to participate in these projects jointly and as an executive (DEUA, 2021b). These projects, which are preferred by local governments for environmental and social investments, are followed by the MoNE (Ministry of National Education) and universities to find resources for educational studies, to provide student and educator mobility, and to provide financial support; and the private sector to provide financial support.

The European Union Education and Culture Programmes published the Bologna Declaration on 9 June 1999 intending to create a higher education system in harmony with each other. Turkey attended this process, also known as the Bologna Process, by signing the declaration in 2001 (EU Centre for Education and Youth Programmes [ABEGPMB], 2005). Turkey, like other countries aspiring to join the EU, considers EU criteria and policies when determining its political, economic, and educational goals, taking into account not only national policies but also EU commission decisions in the operation of educational institutions (Ünal & Özdemir, 2015).

To foster "European consciousness" across the continent, the European Union has launched pilot mobility projects such as Socrates in higher education. The primary objectives of the Socrates program are to strengthen education, disseminate less spoken languages in European languages, collaborate interculturally, and ensure educational innovation and equality. In 2004, Turkey also actively participated in the Socrates program, which was an umbrella program aimed at promoting mobility and exchange between European countries. Between 2007 and 2013, the program's name was changed to Lifelong Learning Program (LLP), and since 2014, it has been renamed "Erasmus+" to reflect its transformation into a large European education and mobility network covering

all segments. In the Erasmus+ program, where the mobility of the educational community is targeted, there are three Main Action areas (Key Action [KA1, KA2, KA3]) benefited by teachers, students, parents, and universities (ua.gov.tr, 2021).

There are many programs and project areas created for the scientific, economic, social, and cultural development and development of EU societies such as Erasmus+, eTwinning, Horizon 2020, Horizon Europe, InvestEU, Space, ESF, LIFE, and EU4Health are some of them (ua.gov.tr, 2021). These programs, which have very large economic budgets, appear to be aimed at raising living standards in Europe and attempting to make Europe stronger in the future against other societies. In order to involve and benefit from these programs in Turkey, stakeholders (education institutions, SMEs, individuals) must participate in the requests for proposals initiated through these programs, become partners, and implement projects. Project preparation, project participation, and project ideas are becoming more important at this point.

Project ideas and project-based training in developing countries are becoming increasingly significant in the process of education every day. In education, students of a project are regarded as a tool for their development. Projects, according to Raghavan, Coken-Regiv, and Strobel (2001), educate students on how to learn and conduct scientific research while living. According to Solomon (Solomon, 2003), project-based learning teaches students how to work in groups and interdisciplinary.

Problem solving and collaborative working are among the most important skills of today's 21st century. To begin resolving a problem, it must first be identified, diagnosed, and potential resolutions suggested. As a result, it is critical that students are educated on a project basis to learn to generate ideas in this direction so that they can recognize issues in school and their social lives, develop solutions and apply these solutions (Koç, Çalık, Zor, Aslan, & Zor, 2020). Larson and Miller (2011) consider that students can convert their cognitive processes into diverse environments by learning these skills. Project development, project engagement, and project-based learning are becoming increasingly important in this regard.

Preparing projects of great importance in educational life, contributing to competitions for the project they have designed, or collectively sponsoring a project; promotes a constructive attitude toward projects and project-based learning in students and educators. As in the EU, several institutions and organizations in Turkey, especially The Scientific And Technological Research Council of Turkey (TUBITAK), organize project activities and competitions to improve research activities, increase competitiveness and cooperation among educational institutions, and develop society. In this regard, TUBITAK's project planning competitions for student groups at all levels (TUBITAK, 2021) are significant.

1.1. Related Researches

Opinions, viewpoints, and ideas of university geography students on EU projects originated with the concept of forming an EU project research team at the outset of the fall semester of the 2020-2021 academic year before the start of this study. As is well known, the importance of project preparation and its impact on students' educational and post-secondary lives is significant. As a result, it was reported that all students in the department wanted to create an EU project, but when the students asked for information about the structure and process of this project, it was decided to research to clarify the situation.

The idea of the project, project-based learning, and EU study are examined, and studying in different disciplines and topics, especially during their education, is found to be positively contributing to the academic development of students. Research into the opinions of society, educators, and students by different scientists at various times may, in this context, be grouped into two headings from an Opinions on EU and an Opinions on Project.

Although it is not directly related to EU projects in the literature, some studies are critical in affecting EU projects when examining attitudes toward the EU. In this regard, Kakilli et al's (2007) study examining university students' expectations of the EU, Kodaman et al's (2008) study to measure their level of consciousness about the EU in the city of Isparta, and Balkar and Özkan's (2010) study examining primary school students' opinions of the EU draw attention. Furthermore, the research conducted by Aksoy and Koç (2012), Alkan (2013), Altay et al. (2013), Oran, Hürsoy, Şenuzun and Yücel (2010), and Yağbasan (2008) are significant in revealing society's perspective on the European Union and their thoughts on EU membership.

There are studies in various dimensions of project development and the European Union equation in the literature. Sezen-Vekli (2020) investigated the effect of project preparation on student development while researching the project design levels of students studying science on the Turkey scale for national support programs. It is critical for students to comprehend how project designs affect their cognitive and professional development. Zaparucha (2007) investigated how project studies make it easier for students to participate in a specific topic in his study titled *Geography with Projects*. In their research, Avcı and Su Özenir (2018) evaluated the project work according to the views of the teachers in the science fair process, so it is valuable to see the teacher-student interaction of the projects. Sözer (2017) attempted to examine the students' achievements while preparing a project for TÜBTAK's "High School Students Research Project Competition." In their master's thesis, Yamiç (2019) investigated the perspectives of science teachers on project preparation and achieved qualitative results on the project. When examining the development of TUBITAK project writing/preparation skills of science teacher candidates, Peten, Yaman, Vekli, and Çavuş (2019) highlight the positive results of these studies. While Önen, Mertoğlu, Saka, and Gürdal (2010) investigated the

effect of in-service training on teachers' project making competencies, Koç, Çalık, T.Zor, Aslan and E.Zor (2020) examined the opinions of higher education students participating in Tübitak project competitions about their projects. Özden, Aydın, Erdem, and Ekmekçi (2009) investigated the impact of project-based science teaching on science and technology teachers' opinions. Nacaroğlu, Arslan, and Bektaş (2019) investigated teachers' perspectives on project studies conducted at the Science and Art Center. In the research conducted by Artvinli, Çetintaş, and Terzi (2020), the consultancy process of research projects carried out with Tübitak secondary school students in the field of Science was evaluated adopting the action research method based on the opinions of teachers and students.

There has been little research on EU projects. It is critical that students participating in this mobility reflect their later experiences, according to Ünal and Özdemir (2015)'s European Union student mobility.

When all of these studies are analyzed, it is obvious that the majority of them are aimed at examining the perspectives of teachers, faculty members, universities, secondary and primary school students on EU participation. In contrast, the importance, perception, current situation, and suggestions of EU projects specific to geography department students are discussed in this study. When they graduated, it was determined that it was critical to investigate the attitudes, thoughts, and expectations of geography department students who would work in many different branches of society regarding European Union projects. In this respect, it is thought that the research will contribute to the literature.

The goal of this study was to identify what students in the geography department at the science and literature faculties thought on European Union projects. As a result, the study sought answer to the research question, "What are the opinions of Geography Department students on the European Union projects?" Based on this research question, the sub-research questions were formulated as follows:

- 1- What are the opinions of geography department students on the EU project concepts and their definitions?
- 2- What are the opinions of geography department students on the EU project activities?
- 3- What are the suggestions of geography department students on EU project activities?

2. Method

2.1. Research design

In this research, the case study pattern, which is a qualitative research method, was used. Case studies are patterns in which the researcher has little control over a current phenomenon in his or her own real-life situation while seeking answers to the questions "why" and "how" (Yin, 2003; Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2013). The case study, according to Creswell (2020), is a qualitative research pattern in which the researcher investigates a situation in depth using multiple data collection methods such as observation, interview, and documents. In this context, the research conducted to examine the opinions of geography department students on EU projects in depth preferred this pattern.

2.2. Participants

The study group in this research is composed of students enrolled in a geography department at a university in Western Anatolia during the 2020-2021 academic year and participating in project team studies. In the research, the maximum diversity sampling method (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2013), which is one of the purposeful sampling methods, was implemented in accordance with the purpose of the study. In line with the purpose of the research, it consists of 14 female and male students who participated in this research voluntarily and participated in the project research team formed within the geography department from different grade levels. Students' names have been coded as follows, Ö1, Ö2, Ö3, and kept confidential. Due to the qualitative dimension of the research, all data obtained from the students were included in the research. Demographic data on the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Data of Students Participating in the Research

	1st Grade	2nd Grade	3rd Grade	4th Grade
Female	Ö3, Ö7, Ö9,	Ö6, Ö8, Ö12	Ö11, Ö13	Ö2, Ö5,
Male	Ö14	Ö4,	Ö1,	Ö10,

According to Table 1, the majority of the students taking part in the study are female. However, it can be seen that the distribution is equal across grade levels.

2.3. Data Collection Tool

A semi-structured interview form was implemented to collect the research data. The literature was first reviewed in order to prepare the interview questions. The questions were presented in the opinion of geography, educational sciences, and linguistics experts. Arrangements for the adequacy, appropriateness, and openness of the questions have been made in accordance with expert opinions. Two questions that were not agreed upon, one question that was outside the scope of the research, and one question that was not clear and concise were removed from the form, which was originally designed of 13 questions. After these arrangements, 9 questions were determined and the interview

form was finalized. Between January and March 2021, the interviews with remote access programs (Zoom, Google Meet) lasted between 17 and 26 minutes. The interview data were converted into text in a computer environment, and the codes and categories were created and analyzed after the participants' approval.

2.4. Validity and Reliability within the Research

Several measures have been taken by the researcher regarding the validity and reliability of the research. While validity is defined as the accuracy and reflection of the findings in qualitative research, reliability is defined as the consistency of the research findings (Golafshani, 2003; Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2013). In this respect, it is of great importance to analyze the data, transfer them to the writing, check their accuracy and conduct a validity and reliability study in qualitative researches conducted with the interview (Kvale, 1996).

It was attempted to reach opinions that would reflect the entire geography department by selecting participants from various grade levels. For the internal validity of the research questions, experts in the field of education, and linguistics were consulted, and modifications were performed based on their feedback. Students' views on EU projects are presented in the findings section by quoting directly. Thus, the validity and reliability of the research findings were attempted to be increased. For the external validity of the research, the participants were informed about the research process and were provided to answer the questions comfortably.

While analyzing the data obtained from the study group for internal reliability, assistance was obtained from a geography expert, and the data were attempted to be described in detail. Because Brannen (1992) states that the age, gender, profession, belief, and socio-economic status of the researchers may be effective in analyzing the data and evaluating its results. As a result, it is critical to involve more than one researcher in the data analysis and evaluation. By comparing the encodings created by two researchers, an unbiased analysis was attempted.

The researchers determined and discussed the codes and categories as "consensus" and "disagreement." The "Reliability= Consensus / (Consensus + Disagreement)" formula specified by Miles and Huberman (1994) was implemented to calculate the reliability of the research. The reliability coefficient among the researchers encoding the research was calculated as .85 using this formula. According to Yıldırım and Şimşek (2013), a compliance percentage of 70% in the reliability calculation is acceptable. In this regard, it is possible to conclude that the reliability coefficient among the research coders is adequate. Common decisions ensured the formation of codes and categories, and as a result of the analyses, it was discovered that the students' opinions were grouped under nine themes.

To determine external reliability, the data were discussed in the discussion and conclusion section in terms of similarities and differences with previous studies on this subject, and the results were correctly conveyed.

2.5. Data Analysis

The obtained data were subjected to both descriptive and content analysis in this study, which was conducted to examine the opinions of geography department students on European Union projects. "The primary goal of content analysis is to identify concepts and relationships that can explain the collected data. In the data obtained in content analysis, similar concepts and themes are combined and organized and interpreted in a way that the reader can understand" (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). The questioning concepts that were at the root of the questions asked in this study were accepted as themes, the answers given by the students to the questions were coded to form categories, and the data were presented in tables in the findings section in detail. Furthermore, while the direct expressions of geography students were written in the findings section, student names were represented with the codes of "Ö1, Ö2, Ö3". It has been attempted to investigate in depth how geography department students think about EU projects using these applications.

3. Results

This section of the study contains the results of the responses given to questions posed to geography department students about their perspectives on EU projects. The findings were discussed in three headings in line with the sub-problems and were described in the summary tables and tried to be given directly with the opinions of the students.

3.1. Findings on the question of what are the opinions of geography department students on EU project concepts and their definitions

Table 2 presents the findings of the answers given by the students of the Department of Geography about the definition of EU projects.

Table 2. Student views on the definition of European Union Projects

Theme	Category	Code	Students
Description of EU Project	It is social, cultural, technological, and economic <u>interaction</u> .	learning about different cultures (2)	Ö2,Ö3,Ö4,Ö6, Ö7,Ö8,Ö9,Ö10,
		social interaction (2)	Ö11,Ö12,Ö13,14
		cultural interaction (2)	
		technological interaction(2)	
		economic interaction (2)	
		learning about cultures	
		social responsibility	

It is social, cultural, technological, and economic <u>development</u> .	social development (2) cultural improvement (2) technological development economic development innovative approach development of technology	Ö2,Ö6,Ö7,Ö8,Ö11,Ö12,Ö13
It is to <u>improve human welfare</u> and benefit society.	benefit of society (3) personal development (2) equality of opportunity	Ö3,Ö4,Ö7,Ö8,Ö10,Ö13
It is a <u>solution-oriented</u> activity.	finding a solution problem exists problem is expanding creative ideas	Ö7,Ö10,Ö11,Ö12,

When we look at the findings related to the definition of EU projects (Table 2), we can see that students from the geography department developed definitions in four different categories in this theme. It can be seen that the category "Social, cultural, technological, and economic interaction" rises to the highest level of categories comprised of codes created regarding student opinions. This category is followed by the category of "social, cultural, technological, and economic development", "improving human welfare", "benefit of society", and "Solution-oriented", respectively. Although students were unable to create a comprehensive definition of EU projects, they each pointed to a different aspect of these projects.

The following are the perspectives of some of the students who developed various definitions for this subject:

Ö2: *"European Union projects as a whole are projects for better interactions such as cultural, economic, social, etc."*

Ö4: *"European Union Projects were created with the aim of increasing the actions carried out by the EU and producing ideas and putting them into action. Aside from economics and politics, it seeks to advance technologically, socially, and culturally, as well as in education and health, and to develop projects aimed at improving human welfare. European Union projects provide the necessary financial assistance and convenience to candidates in order to strengthen foreign relations and intercultural interaction."*

Ö7: *"In fact, the first question when conducting European Union projects is 'What can be done for the benefit of the society?'" Another question is, how can we grow as individuals? Different ideas of young people from various countries and cultures gathered under a project and their interaction form the foundation of European Union projects. In this regard, the European Union aims to progress..."*

Ö10: *"EU projects are initiatives undertaken to address the problems of living beings and nature in EU member countries and to develop solutions. New ideas emerge that have*

the potential to solve the problems of living creatures. Ultimately, it is important for everyone to support useful projects."

Table 3 shows the findings of the premise statements revealed in the cognitive structures of the EU projects statement based on the perspectives of students from the Department of geography.

Table 3. The first expressions that emerged in the cognitive structures of the students of the geography department when the EU projects are mentioned.

Theme	Category	Code	Students
First connotations and thoughts appearing in minds about EU Projects	International Level	International dimension (5) Whole world (1) Global dimension (1)	Ö2, Ö3, Ö4, Ö6, Ö7, Ö8
	Solution-Oriented	Problem solver (2) Investigating common issues (2) Provides a solution Investigates continuously	Ö1, Ö3, Ö4, Ö7, Ö9, Ö11
	Open to innovation	Innovative (2) Develops invention (2) Related to science	Ö4, Ö6, Ö7, Ö11,
	Respect for nature and environment	Environmental protection (2) Protection of water (2) Protection of natural beauties	Ö6, Ö7, Ö8, Ö9

Table 3 shows that the first statements in geography students' cognitive structures regarding EU projects are classified into four categories based on their perspectives. The categories are named regarding the statements of the students as "International Level", "Solution-oriented", "Open to innovations" and "Respect for nature and environment". It is worth noting that five students used the term "international dimension" for these projects. Some students drew attention to different aspects of these projects by using concepts that fall into more than one category. Some of these are as follows:

Ö2: "... I can think of projects that are done on a global scale to meet common needs."

Ö3: "In my opinion EU projects mean, finding solutions to global issues and problems that need to be fixed. In addition, my opinion on EU projects is that it is "useful". Because these projects typically address issues that affect the community on a one-on-one basis."

Ö6: "When it comes to EU projects, I think of scientific studies and European Union countries. It is, in my opinion, very effective in terms of scientific progress and development. However, it is unfortunate that not enough attention is being paid to all

areas. In universities, for example, better projects can be presented by attracting more attention."

Ö7: "Since they seek solutions to global problems rather than just those of their own countries, EU projects are a beacon of hope. When European Union is mentioned, I think of projects that are constantly improving, keeping up with technology, and open to innovations."

Table 4 presents the findings on the level of knowledge of geography department students on EU projects.

Table 4. Students' level of knowledge about EU Projects

Theme	Category	Code	Students
Level of knowledge on EU projects	Weak	very little (4) just new, very weak (2) I have no information (1)	Ö1, Ö5, Ö6, Ö9, Ö10, Ö11, Ö14
	Intermediate	average (2) at a certain level (2)	Ö4, Ö13,
	Good	Good enough	Ö3,

In this section, where students' knowledge of EU projects is measured, it was seen that student opinions are divided into three categories. Those who respond "very little, new, very weak, and have no knowledge" to the question here are classified as "weak." Those who respond "at a certain level and average" are included in the "medium" category, while those who say "sufficient and good" are classified in the "good" category. When the opinions of the participants are examined, it is clear that the majority's knowledge level is low and that they have not received any training in this area. Considering the discourses about the opinions of the students in this theme;

Ö6: "I do not think that I have sufficient knowledge and experience since I have not worked on any project until today or have not researched the subject in detail."

Ö11: "EU projects may be projects that can be used for good, but I'm not well-versed in this area."

Ö5: "I do not have sufficient information on EU projects. I only have knowledge of major EU projects. I assume that these are the Erasmus program, Lifelong Learning, the youth program that supports youth activities, and the program that takes place within the scope of social policy."

Ö3: "I think that my level of knowledge about these projects is good because I have done a lot of research and have gained information on social media."

Ö4: "I don't know much about projects, but I believe that our work on producing projects as part of the technology and design course, which is compulsory in secondary school, is important"

Ö1: "I think my knowledge on EU projects is at a basic level."

Table 5 summarizes the findings regarding the concepts about EU projects that geography department students are familiar with.

Table 5. Concepts that students know about European Union projects

Theme	Category	Code	Students
	I don't know about concepts	I do not know (3) I have no idea (1)	Ö1,Ö4,Ö12,Ö13
	I know about concepts	Erasmus+ (5), receiving a grant (5), Lifelong learning (2), fund (2), intercultural integration, student exchange(1), research and development(1), social policies(1), education(1), visa(1), Jean Monnet(1), teamwork(1), strategy analysis(1), social policy(1), common market(1), innovation(1), employment(1), financing(1), stakeholder analysis(1).	Ö2,Ö3,Ö5,Ö6, Ö7,Ö8,Ö9,Ö10, Ö11,Ö14
Concepts related to EU projects			

It can be seen that students' conceptual knowledge about European Union projects is divided into two categories (Table 5). Students who said "I don't know about concepts" mostly used the expressions "I don't know" and "I don't have an opinion". Students who say "I know about concepts" have emphasized concepts such as "Erasmus+, receiving a grant, lifelong learning, fund, intercultural harmony, student exchange, research and development, social policies, education, visa, Jean Monnet, teamwork, strategy analysis, social policy, common market, innovation, employment, financing, stakeholder analysis". Although there is no clear consensus on EU projects, it is obvious that many concepts are at least being heard. Student opinions about the concepts are as follows:

Ö5: "The concepts I know about EU projects are social policies and education. I know that research is being conducted in this area. Since I am a student, I want to address the

Status of EU project-related activities	Ongoing activity	Activity is being carried out but in a limited way. (2)	Ö5,Ö7
	No ongoing activity	No activity (9) I have no information (3)	Ö1,Ö2,Ö3,Ö4,Ö6, Ö8, Ö9,Ö10,Ö11,Ö12,Ö13,Ö14

When Table 6 is examined, it is apparent that opinions are divided into two categories. It reflects the views of students on EU project-related activities by country, university, and department. The category, in which only two students stated that EU project-related activities were carried out, was named “*activity is being carried out*”. Nevertheless, the vast majority of students declared that there was no study on this subject, even if it was being conducted, their negative attitudes on these matters were collected under the category “*no activity*”. Those who expressed positive opinions replied they learned about EU projects from television news or university websites, while those who expressed negative opinions stated they didn't find any information on the subject.

One of the two students who stated a positive opinion on this theme is the opinion of Ö5, and their statement as follows: “*In this sense, there are currently several EU projects in our university. But I did not see enough information about these projects. However, in my opinion, the number of projects carried out in this context in our university is very limited.*” Another student, Ö7, said; “*There are many projects in our university... However, in EU projects, this number is minimal. As far as I know, there are 15 EU projects in our university. Many of them cover the faculty of engineering and agriculture. There is no project associated with the Faculty of Arts and Letter. I think this number is not sufficient. However, it is a very good opportunity for such projects to be available in our university*”. As can be seen, even students who express a favorable opinion lack a thorough understanding of the project's structure.

Some of the students who expressed negative opinions are as follows:

Ö1: “*Even if there is a project, I have not been informed until now. I assume that I saw some posters hung on the bulletin boards. However, for a long time, the posters on those bulletin boards have failed to compel people to read or consider what has been written. As a result, what is written is quickly ignored and forgotten.*”

Ö3: “*No activity is being carried out. Even when I accessed the school's website, I didn't find any information about it. I don't believe the school has any incentive to achieve it or is involved in Project training work.*”

Ö4: “*Since we were able to study at the university for a half term, I did not have much chance to get to know and see. I haven't seen much activity except for a few musical events. Even if it is conducted, I believe it should not be included in the logic of “produce projects at home” such as homework without boring the students excessively.*”

Since the students stated that the EU project activities were not carried out adequately in the previous question, the reasons for not carrying out these activities

adequately this time were asked. Table 7 presents the results of the students' viewpoints on this subject.

Table 7. Opinions about the inadequacy reasons of EU project activities in Turkey

Theme	Category	Code	Students
Reasons for not having EU project activities	Lack of Education	limited knowledge on these issues (4) lack of foreign language (2) lack of knowledge on project writing More preference for TUBITAK projects not paying enough attention to project training seminars are very limited	Ö1,Ö3,Ö4,Ö5,Ö6, Ö7,Ö8,Ö9,Ö10, Ö11,
	Lack of motivation	lack of incentives (4) lack of interest, desire, curiosity (3) number of participants and interested parties are low people avoiding taking responsibility, not encouraging students	Ö3,Ö4,Ö8,Ö9,Ö11, Ö13,Ö14
	Lack of information	lack of necessary informative activities (3) People are not aware of the issue, not being expressed sufficiently in the national press,	Ö3,Ö5,Ö8,Ö13,Ö14
	Preconception	Not being a member of the European Union (2) research topics are only for some departments, Prioritizing medicine and engineering, Ignoring the geography department, injustice in the project preparation process	Ö2,Ö4,Ö7,Ö10, Ö11,
	Economic difficulties	economic impossibilities (4) lack of project preparation opportunities	Ö3,Ö6,Ö12,Ö13
	Low self-esteem	shyness of the students, fear of failure	Ö10,Ö12

Students' opinions are divided into six categories in this question, where they are asked why EU project-related activities are not carried out sufficiently by country, university, and department. Since several reasons were expressed in the students' responses at the same time, a diverse network of opinions was formed. As shown in Table 7, the category "lack of education" ranked first in terms of the frequency and importance of opinion repetition. The category of "lack of motivation" ranks second in which the students' opinions about the projects are exhibited with low incentives. Following these two categories, the reasons why EU project-related activities are insufficient are presented in the categories of "lack of information," "preconception," "economic difficulties," and "low self-esteem." Some students' perspectives on this theme are as follows:

In the category of "lack of education", the opinions of Ö3 are as follows; *"I believe this is due to a lack of information. The number of resources written in Turkish is quite limited,*

and almost no information about these projects is provided in schools, and/or the information presented is insufficient. Another reason is that students are not encouraged to participate in these projects; most students do not want to be involved in these projects. Students who want to involve in, on the other hand, face with lack of financial resources. This indicates that financial support is not provided."

In the category of "lack of motivation", Ö11's opinions are as follows; Ö11: *"The number of suitable universities to carry out such projects in our country is very limited. Financial inadequacies, students attending university solely to obtain a diploma, those who have projects not being evaluated and not being supported, and brain drain could all be contributing factors to this situation."*

In the category of "lack of information", Ö1's opinions are as follows; *"I think the primary reason is that people are not informed. In general, the fact that students do not know how to enhance themselves in their spare time, as well as the fact that these projects are not adequately made public in the national press, maybe all contributing factors."*

In the category of "bias", Ö7's opinions are as follows; *"According to my research, EU projects primarily focus on the medical, engineering, and agricultural faculties. In the departments of the other faculties, there are limited project opportunities left. There is a tendency towards medical and engineering projects, and they are considered more important, but geography means life itself indeed ... "*

In the category of "economic difficulties", Ö5's opinions are as follows; *"... I think it's because of the country's general issues. Because I believe that if a country has problems in areas such as the economy, there will be deficiencies in other areas, and this will have an impact on the country's universities."*

In the category of "insecurity", Ö10's opinions are as follows; *"... In my opinion, people are avoiding taking responsibility because they are afraid of failing."*

3.3. Findings based on the suggestions of geography department students on EU project activities

With three questions, the opinions and suggestions of geography department students on better understanding EU projects at the university level, designing them correctly, and ensuring more student participation were taken into account.

Table 8 shows the findings on whether geography department students are required to take a compulsory course on EU project or a general project preparation course.

Table 8. Views on the compulsory teaching of a course on EU projects and general project preparation in universities

Theme	Category	Code	Students
Whether or not EU Project Preparation Course to be compulsory	Must be a compulsory course	appropriate (3) Should be a compulsory course (2) must be a compulsory course (2) would be useful (1) must be given as a course(1)	Ö1,Ö2,Ö4,Ö5,Ö6,Ö7, Ö8,Ö10,
	Must not be a compulsory course (should be elective)	not suitable (2) must be elective (2) should not be compulsory(1)	Ö3,Ö9,Ö11,Ö12,Ö13

In this section, where student opinions on compulsory courses on EU projects are solicited from all university departments, particularly geography departments, it is clear that student opinions are divided into two categories. Those who consider "*must be a compulsory course*" on EU project preparation outnumber those who consider "*must not be a compulsory course.*" While students who want it to be a compulsory course stated that it would be beneficial and should be taught, students who do not want it to be compulsory stated that it would not be appropriate for this course to be compulsory, that it would bring extra workload to the students, and that it should be elective.

The following are some of the students who expressed a positive opinion on this topic:

Ö2: "*In fact, having a lesson in this field may be the best way to solve this issue. More projects can be produced as a result.*"

Ö5: "*An EU course can be taught at universities obligatorily. This allows students to acquire more information on EU projects, their scope, and purpose, and, most importantly, the studies conducting in their fields of study. With such a step, I believe that it is possible to achieve the interest not previously reached. I believe that such a step, especially if taken in the name of education, will provide us with new perspectives and impel us forward. Many people in our society view the EU solely from a political standpoint. People will abandon this approach, I believe, as a result of this compulsory course.*"

The following are some of the students who expressed negative opinions:

Ö3: "*It is not appropriate. Because these are volunteer projects. Forcing that to be taught is illogical. When it is made a compulsory course, students will pass it as if it were a regular course and will be uninterested in it. Students may even hate it. If this course is to be*

made compulsory, it should be embraced, the area of interest should be drawn in this direction, and the necessary incentives should be provided.”

Ö9: *“I believe it is more appropriate to offer it as an elective course in all university departments. I believe that elective courses should be chosen based on student's preferences and interests. The start of a project should not be compelled.”*

Table 9 presents the findings on geography department students' suggestions for improving performance on EU projects.

Table 9. Solution offers of geography students regarding the shortcomings of European Union Projects

Theme	Category	Code	Students
Suggestions from geography students for addressing weak points in EU projects	On Educational Perspective	education should be provided (6)	Ö1,Ö3,Ö5,Ö6,Ö
		seminars and conferences should be organized (5)	7,Ö8,Ö9,Ö11,Ö12,Ö13,Ö14
		information meetings (4)	
		Technological support is needed to be provided (2)	
		Project sample review (2)	
		a course should be planned in the department (2)	
		sharing of documents (1)	
		language education should be provided (1)	
		Fieldwork and implementation must be carried out(1)	
		implementation work should be improved(1)	
	professors paying attention to this matter(1)		
	About students	Students who are willing to participate should be chosen (3)	Ö1,Ö3,Ö5,Ö6,Ö7,Ö11,Ö12,Ö13,Ö14
		Students should be encouraged (3)	
		participation should be on a volunteer basis (1)	
		discussion groups should be created(1)	
		collaboration with other university students(1)	
	On economic perspective	Economic support should be provided (1)	Ö5,Ö12
		Incentives should be provided (1)	
	Focus on the matter	advertising (1)	Ö1,Ö8,Ö9, Ö12
		explaining the topics in an attention-grabbing manner(1)	
		being at a student level(1)	
		attention should be paid (1)	
	On the type of Project	specialization regarding the type of project(1)	Ö2,Ö8
		various types of projects should be taught(1)	

The responses given by the Department of Geography students to the question, in which they were asked about the recommendations for solutions that they submitted to reduce their deficiencies, if any, about EU projects, were divided into 5 categories (Table 9). The categories are formed according to the frequency and importance of the opinions. The category "On Educational Perspective" was the category where most of the thoughts were explained. Students place an emphasis on education in order to overcome the knowledge gap that they see in themselves when it comes to project preparation. To increase their level of knowledge about the projects, the students expressed their thoughts, particularly about their situation, in the category "About students." Apart from these two categories, students expressed different and rational thoughts in the categories of "On economic perspective", "Focus on the matter" and "On the type of Project".

Some of the students who expressed their opinion on this issue are as follows:

Ö12: *"We, the students, must conduct extensive research without waiting for someone to guide us. In this regard, we are inadequate. At the very least, I can say that for myself. Additional applied courses for us, geographers, in institutions with high education levels, such as high schools and universities, can be put in place to discuss this issue individually. We are the country's future. We are the best age group to invest in projects of this type."*

Ö11: *"Seminars, conferences, and information should be arranged and supplied. Projects should be anticipated by presenting the subjects to be conducted. Academics must gain more knowledge on this subject and pass it on to us."*

Ö7: *"In the geography department, I believe a course on EU projects could be planned. Alternatively, information can be exchanged by hosting a weekly one-hour debate on this issue. Each week, a topic can be chosen and various activities can be planned around it. Idea exchanges with young people involved in various EU projects can be arranged on occasion. A new project can be carried out by creating a new project subject with the young people working on that project. Geography students from different universities in Turkey may be interviewed online every week or they can communicate face to face when the epidemic of coronavirus is over."*

Ö5: *"In order for them to have enough knowledge in this context, especially geography students should be given conferences. Because the students have no idea what to do. We are encountering issues such as: How do I choose a topic? How do I prepare a project? As a result, these issues should be addressed first and foremost. Surveys should be conducted to ascertain geography students' perspectives on the EU. Because many of our country's students have a negative attitude toward the EU. Language training can be provided to help eliminate language problems. Students of geography should be encouraged to participate in EU projects. Because students are hesitant to take part in these projects. Seminars, conferences, and training should be provided in this context to help students*

avoid becoming indecisive. Students preparing the project should be given adequate financial and technological support."

Table 10 presents the findings from the geography department students' project topic suggestions on preparing EU projects.

Table 10. EU project ideas of geography students

Theme	Category	Code	Students
Geography department students' EU project suggestions	Local	education and raising awareness (4), protection of water (4), protection of agricultural lands (3), pollution of the environment and environmental protection (2), protection of stray animals (2) a project regarding the elderly people where I live, bicycle use and bicycle paths, earthquake preparedness training, river pollution, and air pollution, cleaning of groundwater, afforestation, improving foreign language level	Ö1,Ö4,Ö5,Ö7,Ö8,Ö9,Ö10,Ö12,Ö13,Ö14
	National	plastic wastes (5), education and awareness-raising (4), protection of water (4), pollution of the environment and environmental protection (3), protection of agricultural lands (2), bicycle use and bicycle paths, earthquake awareness, pollution of seas, protection of stray animals, air pollution, renewable energy sources	Ö1,Ö2,Ö3,Ö4,Ö5,Ö6,Ö7,Ö8,Ö11,Ö12,
	International	environmental pollution (3), protection of water, pollution of seas, plastic wastes, education and awareness-raising, renewable energy sources, afforestation, and seedling projects	Ö2,Ö3,Ö5,Ö7,Ö8,

Table 10 categorizes the suggestions of Geography department students for developing an EU project into three categories: local, national, and international. The topics of the students' project proposals are similar in all three categories. These three categories were created, however, due to the different scopes of the projects. While some of the students who made suggestions about *the protection of water* made suggestions that were specific to their region, others made suggestions that were spread out across Turkey. Furthermore, some students made project suggestions about *education and awareness-raising* that were initiated with schools and the people around them locally (in the place where they live), while others made project suggestions covering Turkey and Europe. According to the student opinions on this matter, some of the suggested project proposals are as follows:

Ö1: *"A project about the elderly can be carried out here if we take it one step at a time, beginning with the district where I live. I believe that by collaborating with the municipality on bicycle use and producing new bicycle paths and inexpensive bicycles, the district's use of bicycles can be increased."*

Ö7: *"First, I would look for a solution to a problem in my neighborhood. I live in the province Kırıkclareli, district Lüleburgaz. The pollution of the Ergene River is among the most major challenges here. Because the Marmara Region is an industrial zone, there are numerous factories in the area. The level of air pollution is far too high. In the coming years, water scarcity will have a significant impact on agriculture. The proper use of water and its impact on agriculture are also critical. I'd like to create projects to address these issues."*

Ö8: *"Turkey is not a water-rich country. As a result, I would choose to work on a project about making better use of water resources... A project aimed at raising environmental awareness among preschool and primary school students could be developed. For example, a fun teaching slogan with the title "consume less, use longer, recycle" can be created with thin handbooks with pictures. It is possible to plan a project based on renewable energy sources. Furthermore, sapling projects can be planned to improve afforestation in nature."*

Ö12: *"As a geography student, I'd like to conduct research (fertilizer usage, water consumption, etc.) and develop a useful project, focusing on agriculture and livestock. Later on, I'd like to develop a project based on my research on global issues. Through all of these projects, I hope to improve my foreign language skills as well as my geographic knowledge."*

Ö10: *"It could be a project for the benefit of stray animals as well as garbage and recycling."*

4. Conclusion and Discussion

The findings and comments obtained from the findings on the opinions of geography department students on European Union projects were included in this part of the research.

Although geography students were unable to develop a comprehensive common definition when defining EU projects, they each indicated a different aspect of these projects. Students stated that projects promote social, cultural, technological, and economic development and interaction, and also put an emphasis on the projects are based on social benefit, problem-solving, and equal opportunity. However, in the study conducted by Önen et al. (2010), unlike this research, teachers who participated in in-service training on the project were asked the project description before the training

begins and it was observed that a significant part of the teachers was unable to answer this question.

When it comes to EU Projects, it is clear that the first statements in geography department students' cognitive structures are "internationally, solution-oriented, open to innovations, and respectful to nature/environment." When data were coded during an analysis process, the term "international dimension" was mainly used by students for EU projects. Accordingly, it has been concluded that geography students mostly consider EU projects with their international dimension. In the studies of Ünal and Özdemir (2015), the Erasmus mobility program, which is an EU project, was seen as an educational, socio-cultural, and travel program. Similar to the results of this research, Oran et al. (2010) and Altay et al. (2013), who examined students' perspective on the EU, concluded that students' perspectives on the EU were positive, believed to contribute to the development of our country internationally and bring innovation.

Since geography students use the terms "weak," "intermediate," and "good" to describe their level of knowledge on EU projects, their opinions are accordingly classified into three categories. Although some claim that the level of knowledge is good among the students, it can be stated that the level of knowledge of most of the students is insufficient or even has no knowledge. Similarly, in the research conducted by Alkan (2013), it was concluded that university students' knowledge levels about the EU were weak, and in the study of Yamiç (2019), it was concluded that science teachers found themselves inadequate about project-related issues.

The majority of geography department students stated that they know the concepts related to EU projects. As a result, student opinions are divided into two categories: "I know about concepts" and "I don't know about concepts." Students who stated that they had little knowledge of the concepts indicated that they had not heard the concepts related to this subject and that they were uninterested. When considering the opinions of students who claim to understand the concepts, it is evident that they mostly repeat concepts such as "Erasmus+, grant support, lifelong learning, fund, intercultural harmony, student exchange." It is clear that they are mostly familiar with concepts related to educational projects and are unaware of other research projects in this area. These statements indicate that students have a basic understanding of EU projects.

Except for two students, it was concluded that geography department students were not optimistic about whether EU project-related activities were carried out at the national and international levels. It was indicated that the students had either never heard of these projects or had received insufficient information about them and thus needed to learn more about them. Similarly, in a study conducted with midwifery and nursing department students by Oran et al. (2010), 79.6 % of the students stated that society was not adequately informed about EU membership.

Geography department students' opinions on not performing EU project activities adequately are classified under six categories. According to the students' opinions, it is concluded that a lack of education is the most significant factor in the fact that EU projects are few and never implemented. Furthermore, it has been concluded that lack of motivation, prejudices, economic difficulties, and lack of self-confidence are also important factors. According to Yamiç (2019), science teachers were hesitant to participate in projects for a variety of reasons, including a lack of time to prepare projects, the fact that it would add to their workload, the fact that they would not be rewarded equally for their efforts, a fear of project rejection, and a sense of inadequacy. Koç et al. (2020) found that university students faced various difficulties such as technical problems during the project process. Teachers who mentor these projects, according to the research conducted by Artvinli et al. (2020), complain that they are time-consuming. In the studies of Ünal and Özdemir (2015), it was concluded that there were positive changes in self-confidence and individual development in students after participating in the EU Erasmus+ Program, and for this reason, it was emphasized that such activities should be encouraged.

The opinions of geography department students on whether a course on EU projects should be compulsory in all university departments, particularly geography departments, are divided into two categories. While those who want such a course to be compulsory stated that it would be beneficial, increase knowledge and experience, those who do not want it to be compulsory stated that it was unnecessary, that no forced work could be done, that it would add extra workload to the students, and that it should be elective. This finding suggests that students are interested in EU projects. Similarly, in Ünal and Özdemir's (2015) research, "interest" was identified as one of the factors influencing students' participation in the Erasmus+ Program, an EU project. In this case, it leads us to the conclusion that the optional teaching of a course rather than a compulsory one, on EU projects will provide students with an opportunity to learn about the project structure. Similarly, in the study of Özden et al. (2009), it was concluded that elective or compulsory courses that could be included in the curriculum would give prospective teachers a project-based learning understanding.

The recommendations made by Department of Geography students about bringing a solution to reduce their deficiencies about EU projects were divided into five categories. In this regard, students primarily expressed their opinions on educational dimensions and student dimensions. The intensity in the education category, in particular, indicates that students are under-educated about the project. As a result, they suggested that more education be provided. They expressed that it was critical to educate, inform, and encourage students. Some students stated their opinions in the dimensions of "economic, focus on the subject, and project type" and presented their suggestions on student selection, providing economic support, focusing on project issues, and clarifying project types to develop an EU project. Furthermore, it was revealed that students provided

rational solutions to EU projects. Similarly, Özden et al. (2009), Peten et al. (2019), and Artvinli et al. (2020) emphasized the fact that it would be beneficial if scientific organizations plan project training workshops and provide training due to a lack of project knowledge.

It was discovered that students in the Geography department perceived the question of what type of EU project they wanted to create as local, national, and international contexts. As a result, student opinions are divided into three categories. Among these issues, it was determined that "education, consciousness-raising, and awareness-raising", "water protection", "protection of agricultural lands", and "environmental pollution - environmental protection" were at the forefront. While some students only present suggestions specific to the region in which they live, others present project proposals at the national and international levels, which is remarkable in terms of diversity of opinion. Koç et al. (2020) stated that students started project development mostly on issues aimed at solving environmental, economic, and daily life problems.

As a result of the development, improvement, and construction of EU projects, students will gain many positive skills such as teamwork, innovative and critical thinking, technology-oriented, communion, and open-mindedness. The findings of the studies conducted by Özden et al. (2009) and Artvinli et al. (2020) are similar. In this context, it was concluded that the students who took part in the research had a positive opinion on EU projects. Seeing that students will work collaboratively, achieve an international dimension in their education, focus on scientific studies and devote the majority of their time to this subject, and gain 21st-century skills more quickly, this conclusion has been put forward.

First and foremost, the definition and significance of the project concept can be explained to educators and students at all levels of education using various examples and practices.

In this regard, students and educators can be motivated, especially by being supported on EU projects.

University students, particularly students in the geography department, should be better informed and supported to create and present projects as well as participate in ongoing projects.

Information activities can be carried out in small groups for all students to make EU projects more recognizable in society and among higher education students.

Academics can provide voluntary consultancy to carry out various EU projects within the framework of the wide range of topics available to geography students.

An elective course, rather than a compulsory one, can be given in all higher education institutions in all departments for project preparation, project writing, and implementation of the EU project.

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