Being an International Student in Zonguldak: Adaptation, Feelings, Benefits, and Challenges

Zonguldak'ta Uluslararası Öğrenci Olmak: Uyum, Duygular, Faydalar ve Zorluklar

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Abstract: The aim of this study was to reveal students' feelings, thoughts, challenges, and opinions about studying in Zonguldak as an international student. Case study design was employed in this qualitative study, and it was conducted with 15 international students studying in different disciplines in ZBEUN in the academic year of 2021-2022. The data were collected using a semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face in a predetermined place, and the collected qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis method. It was found that the findings obtained from the opinions of the international students are covered under the themes of feelings, expectations, benefits, circle of friends, adaptation, application process, school life, plans for the future, and challenges. Also, various sub-themes were identified under these themes.

Keywords: International students, adaptation, challenges, feelings, qualitative study

Öz: Bu çalışmanın amacı, uluslararası öğrencilerin Zonguldak'ta uluslararası bir öğrenci olarak eğitim görmeye ilişkin duygularını, düşüncelerini, yaşadıkları zorlukları ve görüşlerini ortaya çıkarmaktır. Bu çalışmada nitel yöntemlerden biri olan durum çalışması deseni kullanılmış ve çalışma 2021-2022 eğitim-öğretim yılında ZBEUN'da farklı bölümlerde öğrenim görmekte olan 15 uluslararası öğrenci ile yürütülmüştür. Veriler, araştırmacılar tarafından geliştirilen yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu kullanılarak toplanmıştır. Yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler önceden belirlenen bir yerde yüz yüze gerçekleştirilmiş ve toplanan nitel veriler içerik analizi yöntemiyle çözümlenmiştir. Uluslararası öğrencilerin görüşlerinden elde edilen bulguların duygular, beklentiler, faydalar, arkadaş çevresi, uyum, başvuru süreci, okul hayatı, gelecek planları ve zorluklar temaları altında toplandığı görülmüştür. Ayrıca bu temalar altında çeşitli alt temalar belirlenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Uluslararası öğrenciler, uyum, zorluklar, duygular, nitel çalışma

Introduction

Global advances in science and technology have ushered in a new era of globalization, with more social mobility and interconnections between different nations, cultures, and social groups. While most of this movement is voluntary, such as attending a university in another nation or taking a language course, in other circumstances social mobility may occur unwillingly due to civil wars, natural catastrophes, unemployment, food shortages, and so on. Adapting to new cultures and social surroundings may be difficult for individuals in both voluntary and involuntary situations (Duru & Balkıs, 2013). Today, there are an unprecedented number of displaced individuals from children to youth and adults who are seeking for primary and secondary education, higher education opportunities and lifelong learning (Streitwieser, 2019). Whether this mobility occurs intentionally or unintentionally, apart from adults, it is critical to comprehend the experiences of school-aged children and teens as they adapt to a new nation, a new educational system, and new educational difficulties and benefits (Mendenhall et al., 2017). That may be the reason for regarding international students as the core contextual background of globalization (Montgomery, 2010).

Due to the increasing demands for internationalization and globalization, an ideal education system today requires students not only to do well academically but also to be prepared with cross-cultural understanding. This fact becomes evident with the growing number of students seeking higher education overseas, indicating a great demand for social skills and cultural awareness to help in their transition to the host

nation. However, many overseas students arrive in their host country physically, emotionally, or financially unprepared with little knowledge and information about the destination country (Idrus, 2021). As it can be inferred, when these inadequacies are not met, students may have to deal with many difficulties. This would-be process can be related to the students' culture of origin and the host culture's accordance (Poyrazlı & Mitchell, 2020). Therefore, the cultural background itself can affect students' adaptation, feelings, benefits, and challenges.

As mentioned above students can encounter lots of issues and problems at the time they stepped into another country. For instance, individuals have challenges with academic adaptation, which some scholars have defined as the process of appreciating and acquiring the target culture in an academic context. (Kashima & Loh, 2006; Kim, 2012). For example, Trice (2004) commented in her article that international students spending time socially with American students are more satisfied academically and better adjusted culturally to their experience abroad. They are also less likely to have anxiety and feel alienated. Wenhua and Zhe (2013) collected these challenges under five headings including academic issues, namely, personal psychological issues (homesickness, seclusion, depression, stress, anxiety, frustration, confusion, etc.), academic issues (academic improvement and demands, difficulty in perceiving the educational system, issues with accessing academic counseling and other support services like a library in the school, etc.), socio-cultural issues (culture shock, prejudice, racial discrimination, difficulties in getting used to new social and cultural customs, rules and regulations

and partaking in interculturally socializing activities, etc.), general concerns with living (asylum problems, monetary issues, safety risks, etc.) and language proficiency (communication issues with locals, understanding lecture, writing articles, etc.). They also mentioned that the magnitude of these challenges may vary from country to country and institution to institution, etc.

In their study, Hou and Du (2022) underscored that economic and political ties between countries have paved the way for new international student mobility patterns. To justify this, they applied social network analysis to explore the growth of the international student mobility network between 2001 and 2015. The results showed that international student mobility has not been confined to specific developed nations in the Western. The dominance of traditionally destined nations waned, and some regional hubs emerged rapidly. They also mentioned that Türkiye grew from semi-periphery countries of regions to strong semi-periphery countries together with Russia, Ukraine, Malaysia, Italy, Australia, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, and Hong Kong. Türkiye also has become a center of attraction for students to get higher education from African and other Muslim countries because of its position, belief structure, and advancements in economic and social position compared to its counterpart countries (İnce & Koçak, 2018). Türkiye has welcomed numerous international students offering them scholarships and ensuring that they receive an excellent education. In particular, scholarships have been offered since the 1960s within the scope of the bilateral agreements signed with foreign governments (Ünal, 2019). According to the Council of Higher Education's (CHI, 2023) yearly statistics on higher education in Türkiye, the number of students from all over the world coming to Türkiye is 223.952. Among these students, 142.933 were male and 81.019 were female. So, it is a gospel truth that this influx of students will have miscellaneous feelings, challenges, hopes, disappointments, and expectations. Türkiye might be a unique country when compared to other countries that host international students with respect to predominant dynamics drawing students to Türkiye. Some other countries have some formal strategies (e.g. organizing fairs) to attract more students. Yet, in Türkiye it is hard to meet consistently framed strategies to attract students. So, there could be several reasons for choosing Türkiye. For example, cultural and geographical proximity, low tuition fees, and the prospect of staying in Türkiye can be the reasons for the students of Turkic Republics and the Balkans, while it can be a chance for cultural exchange for the students from Western and developed countries (Çetinkaya-Yıldız et al., 2011). As it is seen above, the mentality of students for choosing Türkiye for education varies from country to country for several reasons.

In Türkiye, studies are generally conducted on challenges faced by the refugee students or only on international students choosing Türkiye by their own will and on specific ethnicity. Besides, their feelings, benefits, and expectations were neglected. In this study, the study group consists of both the refugee students and the latter or the migrants who migrated to Türkiye with their families years ago. For example, in their study, Ateşok et al. (2019) tried to reveal the challenges Syrian students met. Financial hardship, language issues, non-recognition of prior learning, and a lack of information or guidance were found to be the challenges they experienced. Yılmazel and Atay (2023) searched for the challenges of international students beginning or continuing their education

in Türkiye. They gathered challenges in two dimensions which are school related (exams, courses and their contents, homework, etc.) and language learning challenges (Turkish and English language learning processes). Titrek et al. (2016) also revealed the international students' challenges from different countries attending a university in Türkiye in their research. They found out that the challenges were health issues, problems in communication, cultural and social issues, activities, and accommodation. They also mentioned that these challenges must be minimized as soon as possible with short and long-term measures. Duru and Balkıs (2013) handled the subject of homesickness in their research and found that homesickness is a real hurdle for students' nascent careers, if not alleviated by physiological help and guidance.

Many students from different ethnicities and origins exist in Turkish society and the Turkish education system. Understanding them and finding some solutions to their problems and challenges may only be possible by knowing them deeply. Besides, a prudent way to know them deeply is knowing their experiences in the cities they are living in before asking them about the ideas of the whole country. Most of the studies in the literature aimed to investigate challenges of the international students. However, this study together with challenges aims to reveal students' feelings, expectations, and benefits restricted to the city they live in and the education they get. To this end, the following question was sought:

1. What are the international students' feelings, thoughts, challenges, and opinions about studying in Zonguldak as an international student?

Method

Research Design

A case study design was employed in this qualitative study. In case studies, which allow the situation occurring in a certain period and place to be examined in depth in their own context (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007), the factors related to the individual, event, community or situation are examined with a holistic approach (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). In this study, it was aimed to determine the feelings, thoughts, and opinions of the international students studying at Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University (ZBEUN) about being an international student in Zonguldak. Therefore, a case study design was employed in this study.

Research Setting and Study Group

The study was conducted in ZBEUN in Zonguldak which is a city with a population of 588.510 in the Northern part of Türkiye. ZBEUN has 2.032 international students from 77 different countries, and it has 31.818 students in total in the 2021-2022 academic year. The study group was recruited from these students using a criterion sampling method which is one of the purposeful sampling methods. The criterion sampling method is used to select participants according to specified criteria regarding the study aims (Patton, 2014; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). According to the inclusion criteria of this study, international students studying in different disciplines in ZBEUN and who volunteered to participate in the study were included in the study sample. The study group included 15 students (1 female, 14 male) studying in different disciplines in ZBEUN in the academic year of 2021-2022. The mean age of the students was 22.66 (SD = 3.17) ranging from 19 to 29. The demographic information about the students is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the students

Demographic Characteristics		f	%
Gender	Female	1	7
	Male	14	93
Nationality	Palestinian	2	13
	Iraqi	5	33
	Afghani	1	7
	Syrian	5	33
	Israeli	1	7
	Yemeni	1	7
Years spent in Türkiye	Less than 4 years	6	40
	Between 5 and 8 years	8	53
	More than 9 years	1	7
Marital status	Single	15	100
	Married	0	0
Educational Background of Mother	Primary	2	13
	Secondary	2	13
	High school	7	47
	University	4	27
	Master/PhD	0	0
Educational Background of Father	Primary	1	7
	Secondary	1	7
	High school	5	33
	University	8	53
	Master/PhD	0	0

As seen in Table 1, most of the students are Iraqi (33%) and Syrian (33%), and all the students are single. Also, 53% of them have spent between 5 and 8 years in Türkiye while 40% of them have spent less than 4 years. Besides, most of the students' mothers have high school (47%) and university degrees (27%) while the majority of their fathers are graduates of university (53%) and high school (33%).

Data Collection Tools

Semi Structured Interview Form

A semi-structured interview form developed by the researchers was used to determine the feelings, thoughts, challenges, and opinions of the international students about being international students in Zonguldak. Before developing the semi-structured interview form, a comprehensive literature review was conducted on the subject, and then a draft interview form containing the interview questions based on the purpose of the study was created. The questions in the draft semi-structured interview form were submitted to two faculty members who work in the field of education and have qualitative study experience so that they could examine them in terms of their suitability for both the purpose of the research and the semi-structured interview technique. Some changes like corrections in spelling and meaning or minor changes in the content of the questions were made based on the feedback of the experts. Then, a pilot application with two students was carried out to evaluate the intelligibility of the questions in the form. After the pilot application, the semi-structured interview form with 33 questions was finalized.

Data Collection

The data were collected in the fall term of the 2021-2022 academic year following obtaining the ethical committee approval from ZBEUN. Semi structured interviews were conducted face-to-face in a predetermined place (teacher's office or classroom, etc.) in ZBEUN with each student.

Interview time is mutually agreed upon with the students. Before asking the interview questions, firstly privacy and confidentiality issues were explained to the students thoroughly and they were informed about their right to withdraw from the study with their own will. The interviews were recorded by the researcher after getting the permission of the interviewee. The interviews lasted about 10 hours in total (between 25 and 45 minutes).

Data Analysis

Qualitative data obtained from semi structured interviews were analyzed using the content analysis method. In the content analysis method, which aims to reach concepts and relationships that can represent the data obtained by qualitative methods, codes, sub-themes, and themes are determined by coding the data (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). According to Yıldırım and Şimşek (2016), content analysis is carried out in three stages: coding and categorizing the data, finding the themes, and interpreting the findings. The analysis of the qualitative data obtained from 15 international students studying in ZBEUN started with the transcription of the audio recordings verbatim, and the 25-page document was examined in detail. Then, the coding, labeling, categorizing, and theming procedures were completed. After that, the obtained findings were interpreted. Direct quotations from the interviews were included in the text to support the findings.

Validity and Reliability

For validity and reliability issues in qualitative research, there are four basic criteria, namely, credibility, reliability, confirmability, and transferability (Spencer & Ritchie, 2012). During qualitative inquiries, interviewees become sincerer while responding to the questions if an atmosphere of trust is built and prolonged engagement of the researcher in the field can help this (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). In this study, an informal atmosphere was tried to be created to ensure that students are relaxed during the interviews. Also, the interviewees have already known the researcher beforehand who had a supportive role in building a relaxing atmosphere. Besides, two experts helped during the planning and implementation stages of this study which served as a peer debriefing method resulting in enhancing credibility. In addition to these, the accuracy, authenticity, and objectivity of the analysis were enhanced using the collaboration method, and the data were analyzed by both researchers independently, and then the findings were compared. The intercoder reliability was calculated using Miles and Huberman's method (1994) as 92% proving the reliability of the study. Also, to ensure the validity of the study, direct quotations were used. Detailed descriptions were made by the researchers to ensure the repeatability of the study, and the raw data were kept for possible revisions in the future which increases the confirmability of the study.

Findings

Findings from the semi-structured interviews showed that international students have miscellaneous thoughts on their new life in the university since the time they stepped in. As can be seen in Figure 1, researchers found nine themes such as feelings, expectations, benefits, circle of friends, adaptation, the application process, school life, plans for the future, and challenges.
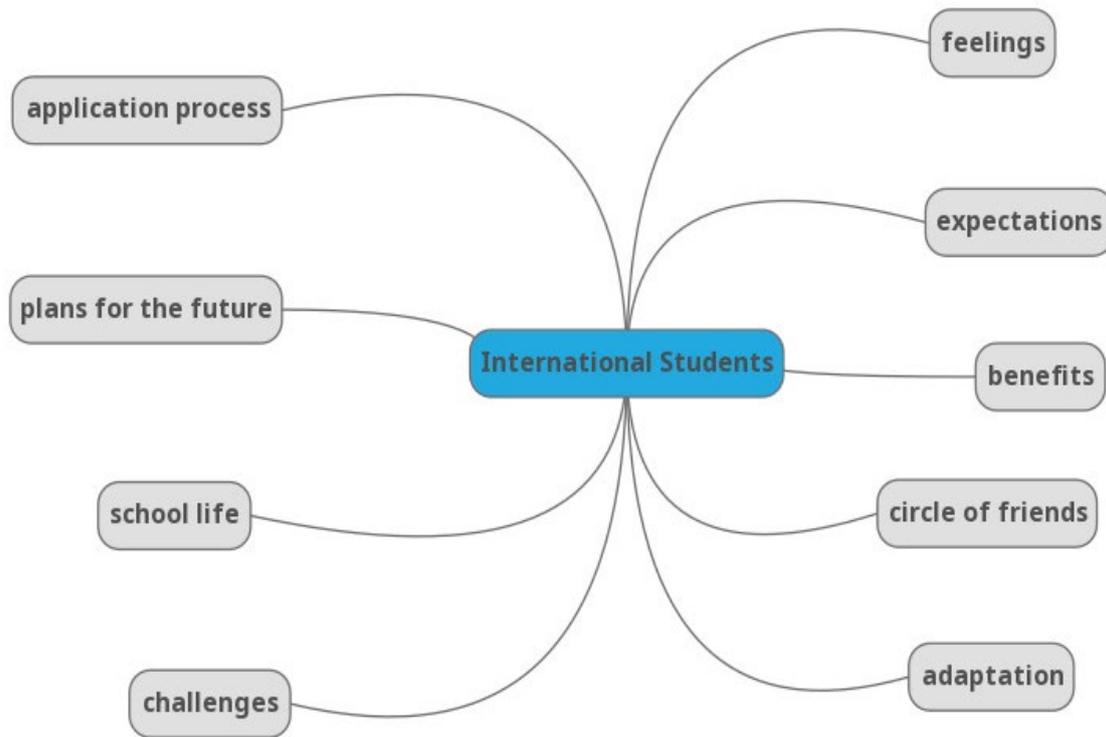
Figure 1. Nine themes were found after analyzing the data

As can be seen in Figure 2, under the theme feelings, alienation, tension, ambition, getting used to school, and family sub-themes were determined. Most of the students felt alienated and tense on the first day of their school life. Being far from their family, having an education far from their hometowns, and fear of not having friends may have caused these negative feelings. However, they have their ambition for their education, and they seemed to get used to their new life, and their feelings began to fade away or transformed. These can be seen from the statements below:

[…] I really felt alienated however I got used to it later. I got used to friends. Just became friends and I overcame it.

[…] [ee] at the beginning, when I first came here it was a weird feeling... in a foreign country, seeing myself out of my own state... having an education here…but I was ambitious.

[…] the first day was bad. I felt tense cause I was far away from my family; I was a little bit sad but as time goes by, I got used to it.

[…] I was tense cause I was thinking that I won't have any friends. Because I didn't have any friends in high school as I was a foreigner. But it was different than I expected I came here and made friends from the very beginning.

Under the theme of expectations determined sub-themes were the education in Türkiye, the meaning of having an education in Türkiye, and previous knowledge about Türkiye (see Figure 2). When education in Türkiye comes to their minds, students are expecting a valuable diploma or certificate, to be successful, to pass their classes with merit, and to go back to their country to use the diploma to have a good job there. These can be seen from the statements below:

[…] my expectation from the university [eee] to succeed in my department it is necessary to be successful. I hope that our university will make me a specialist in my department.

[…] I am expecting to get success with merit. I liked the university. The Turkish education system is complete.

[…] My expectations before coming to Türkiye are to get good grades and have a good diploma in Türkiye so that I will have a good job when I return to my country. I am not disappointed that I chose Türkiye for university. Because my mother and I came to Türkiye before starting university here. She said that this place is good, and I can attend university there, and she approved.

Although students would like to be successful and have a valuable diploma, when they were asked about the meaning of having an education in Türkiye, opinions were divided into two parts. Together with the students holding good opinions about having an education here, so many students said that it means nothing to them. Besides, they attributed the meaning of having an education in Türkiye to lower prices. They also mentioned the valuable diploma one more time. These can be seen from the statements below:

[…] having an education here is an honor for us. They made it easier for us to have an education here. In our country I can't pass by the university building let alone have an education there in my country.

[…] I don't think it means something to me. It has no difference than having an education in any country, any city in any way. It is the same.

[…] it means nothing to me. Education in another country may be the same, but the culture will be different. Well, the way of living would be different. It becomes different, but education remains the same.

[…] Türkiye is not that expensive. Other places are expensive.
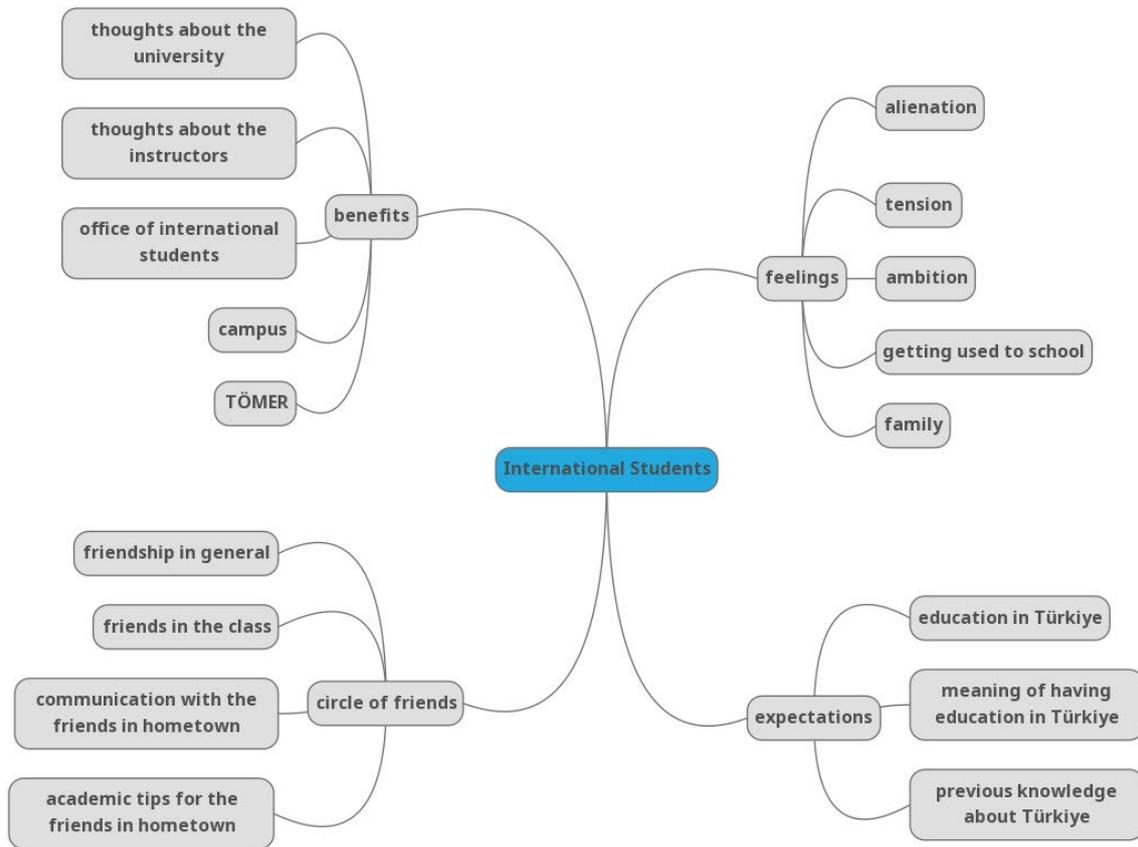
Figure 2. Sub-themes of the feelings, expectations, benefits, and circle of friends themes

As for the knowledge of the students about Türkiye before coming here, students either had some previous knowledge or not. The students said that they had prior knowledge somehow such as from films, TV series, books, or Ottoman history, the Turkish constructing companies in their country, and the reputation of the Turks in Arab culture. Some others mentioned that they haven't heard of it. These can be seen from the statements below:

[…] I knew about Türkiye from books, so I knew from the Ottoman Empire, I knew from the Ottoman Empire, so…
[…] I only knew about Istanbul; I had heard of it and watched the series. Nothing more.
[…] I have known about Türkiye before. There were Turks who built buildings in our country and other countries.
[…] So just as Germany is like your dream world to you, Türkiye is like a dream world to us. There are a lot of coincidences, extreme. there are many arrivals and departures. In other words, the thing is that Türkiye is a valuable state, a certain state for Arabs. In other words, there are no Arabs who do not hear Türkiye.

Under the themes of benefits, there were five sub-themes, namely, thoughts about the university, thoughts about the instructors, office of international students, campus, TÖMER (see Figure 2). Students mostly love their university in respect of the opportunities and facilities it presents for the international students. Besides, they find the instructors distinguished with their teaching and availability. Moreover, some of the students evaluated the benefits concerning to university's location. These can be seen from the statements below:

[…] Well, I mean, there is a lot of convenience for us at the university, that is, there is extreme convenience for
foreigners, that is, it provides a lot of convenience, especially for foreigners. That's why when you look at the students at the university, when you look at the students, [eee] foreigners are always more than locals, they are many in number.
[…] I can say that the university here is good. Because, for example, it is easy to apply. If you have a high school diploma, you don't need to enter YÖS. You can apply directly.
[…] Well, this university is very good. In respect of students, in respect of making friends, you can reach teachers quickly and easily, that is, you can talk to them as a friend. Well, the thing is, I know some friends, neither they could make friends, nor reach their instructors. They can't talk anything about their problems, but there are no such problems here.
[…] I mean, the thing about the university, it's a beautiful university, the place, the place was very beautiful, across the sea, well, the students are very happy because it's across the sea, I mean. We can swim there with a view. As an education, it's good, not bad.

Some students know that there is an office for international students, but some do not know whether it exists or not. However, even though they know about it, they do not prefer to go there to solve their problems or get some information. They prefer international students' communities or WhatsApp groups instead. The ones who had been there are either pleased with its service or not. Here are the statements related to these:

[…] as far as I know, there is not. But there are communities in each school for example, Iraqi students' community, Syrian students' community. So, everyone

helps the students. Syrian students' community helps Syrians. Iraq students' community helps Iraqi students.

[...] of course, there is. But office... as an office, I have never been there. But we have a WhatsApp group set by... for example, former students in the third or fourth year, opened a group. They say as a head of the group we can tell our problems to them. Problems are collected and they go to university and help us.

[...] I know there is once I went there. There was a mistake in the name of my mom and dad. He solved the problem. He was a real gentleman. He solved it on the spot. They always handle the problems directly not only as an office but also as a guidance counsellor.

[...] I once went there but they weren't interested in me.

The most beneficial part of campus and university life for the students was the friendship they had. Friendship was the most prominent concept for them during their life in the school. New cultures and languages are the other concepts. Here are the statements related to these:

[...] I gained lots of things. Improved myself. New talents. New cultures. Language for example. I learned about new cultures because I saw a lot of foreigners here. I also learnt new languages because I meet different people, I learn new information every day. I learn a new word every day for example Turkish.

[...] I have gained experience, so even though I have lost one year, I have gained experience, gained a friendship environment, gained new things, so there is not much I have lost. Even if I have two years to go, I have a gain, there is no loss.

[...] I gained lots of things, I improved my English, I had a circle of friends. [Teacher, ee] I will complete my education. I am sure school will give me good skills in mathematics and engineering.

As for TÖMER education, most of the students did not attend TÖMER as they have been living in Türkiye for a long time. They have already improved their Turkish to the level of C1. Besides, the ones attending TÖMER were pleased. These can be seen from the statements below:

[...] as I have been here since high school, I did not need to attend TÖMER.

[...] TÖMER education was useful but it was expensive.

[...] academically it is really good.

The sub-themes under the theme of the circle of friends were friendship in general, friends in the class, communication with the friends in their hometown, and academic tips for the friends in their hometown (See Figure 2). Students have friendships with Turks, foreigners like them or both groups. These can be seen from the statements below:

[...] I prefer talking to both Turks and friends from my group.

[...] I like friendship and I like talking. I am friends mostly with Turks.

[...] I only have Turkish friends at work. I spend time with foreigners.

Most of the students keep in touch with the friends in their hometown while some others are not. They generally talk about Türkiye, their daily life, and school life with the friends in their hometown. These can be seen from the statements below:

[...] I am in touch with them. I talk about what we did at school like we did this that, etc.

[...] I tell them how my day passed.

[...] I am in touch with them. I tell them they can find whatever they want in Türkiye. I say we can go to Antalya or Trabzon for a trip.

Most students have good relationships with their classmates. They mention that their classmates treat them well and have a smooth relationship with them. The ones having problems with their classmates will be touched on under the challenges theme. These can be seen from the statements below:

[...] there is no problem with my classmates they treat me as if I was not coming from a foreign country.

[...] their attitudes are really good, but I have a habit of not being intimate and close.

[...] I have been in Türkiye for nearly 7 years I haven't witnessed anything bad.

Students' academic pieces of advice for their friends in their hometown are about learning Turkish, how to choose a university, and studying hard. These can be seen from the statements below:

[...] so if he/she comes for academically, they should not take the rank of the university. I think these ranks do not mean anything, just look at the quality of the university and also the ambiance of the city.

[...] they must learn Turkish well.

[...] learn Turkish, get along well with the society, and follow the lectures.

[...] learn Turkish choose your friends of your own will, do not care about anyone.

As can be seen in Figure 3, under the theme of adaptation, Türkiye, university, accommodation, economic situation, language, cultural differences, health service, daily life, problems in daily life, behaviors of craftsmen, and Zonguldak were the sub-themes. Few students mentioned that they adapted easily to Türkiye as it is a Muslim country, they have been to Türkiye beforehand, and similarity between Turkish and their mother tongues. These can be seen from the statements below:

[...] Turkish and Arabic languages have lots of vocabulary in common. Turks are Muslims we share the same religion. Especially Zonguldak people are understanding people. Well, there was a grocery store in the building where I was, he knew that I didn't speak Turkish, he helped me a lot. May Allah be pleased with him. They would always help me. In other words, since most of the people of [ee] Zonguldak are also students, that is, there is not much trouble in getting used to it.

[...] I am a Muslim [ee] It was very simple because the Turkish people are also Muslim [ee] it was very easy to get used to because [ee] the Turkish people have Ramadan, they have Eid, they have mosques. It was easy to get used to, it would be easy for a Muslim to get used to a Muslim country. In fact, it would be very easy. Well, anyway, I haven't come across anyone other than Muslims. I haven't come across as a foreign student. I didn't come across it or even hear about it. There is, and as I said, there is, it is very rare, so it is very easy for Muslims to get used to.

[...] I already went to Şanlıurfa in Türkiye when I first arrived. In other words, almost everyone was Arab. Well, everywhere was Arab, so even the government offices were Arab. Well, that's why it wasn't difficult for me to adapt.
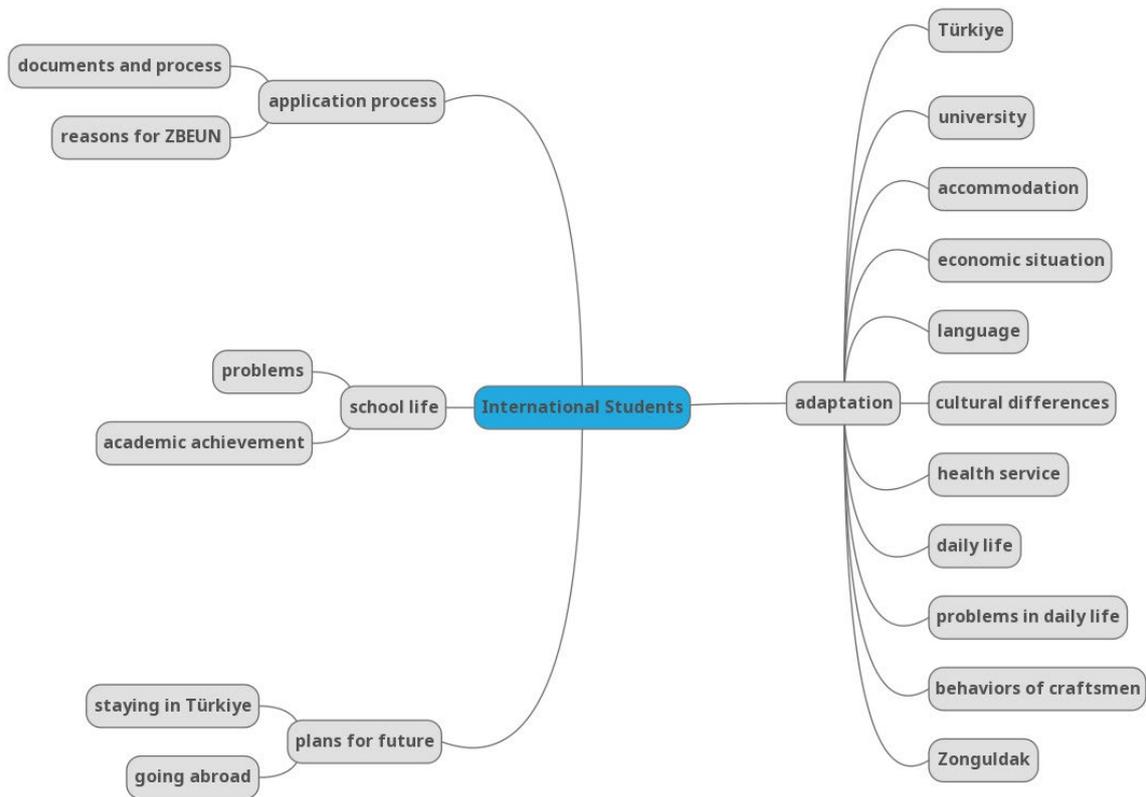
Figure 3. Sub-themes of the adaptation, application process, school life, and plans for future themes

Most students have acquaintances here in Zonguldak beforehand. So, it was easy for them to find a place to stay and live. It has been seen that most students stay at houses instead of dormitories. These can be seen from the statements below:

> *[…] I came here and rented a house. I did not have a hard time thanks God. I rented a house in a day. Expenses are not much. I make my ends meet.*
> *[…] I stayed in a hotel for one week and then I found my old friend. He helped me to find a house. Financially it doesn't bother me.*
> *[…] I didn't search for a house for so long because I, well, I came directly as soon as I was accepted for Zonguldak. I also had two friends, as I said, I came at the recommendation. That's why I came straight to my friend's house.*

Students' incomes are generally supplied by their families. They generally spend money on food and house expenditures. These can be seen from the statements below:

> *[…] my family sends me money. I spent on food mostly.*
> *[…] my father sends me money as we are students, I spend money on food.*
> *[…] I want money from my family. If I have money to eat my fill during my education years. I won't want more.*

When they evaluate their Turkish skills, students generally find it average, and they find it useful in making friends and following the lectures. These can be seen from the statements below:

> *[…] my Turkish is average. Both in lessons and in daily life, it is an advantage.*
> *[…] my Turkish is not too bad. It was beneficial to make friends and chat with the instructors.*
> *[…] my Turkish is average. I find it unnecessary for the lectures. It is good to communicate with my friends outside of classes.*

Some students found cultural differences, while some did not. Most striking cultural difference they find is food culture, and they have also mentioned some other differences. These can be seen from the statements below:

> *[…] as we are both Muslims, there is no cultural difference. We salaam, they shake hands.*
> *[…] there is no similarity, but there are differences. If my dad worked in my country, it would be enough. Women and men are not mixed there.*
> *[…] it is different respecting nutrition. They eat bread a lot.*
> *[…] Marriages are similar to our culture; Turks are similar in everyday habits to us. Eating and drinking are different. Beans, for example, we don't have either.*

Some students are really pleased with the health service in Türkiye. They take advantage of the health service easily and without a problem. They convey their problems to doctors easily too. These can be seen from the statements below:

> *[…] one benefits from hospital services easily. I have no difficulty in explaining my problems.*
> *[…] I can explain my problems, but those who do not speak Turkish have difficulties.*
> *[…] I had insurance, but now I do not have it. I can explain my problems.*

Students read books, watch films or TV series in their spare time. These can be seen from the statements below:

> *[…] I either watch TV or read books.*
> *[…] I do not have a spare time, but if I have, I watch films.*
> *[…] I watch Turkish TV series, or I go to the library to read a book.*

If students have a problem in their daily lives, they tell it either to their parents or their friends to sort it out. These can be seen from the statements below:

> *[…] I tell my problems to my parents, or I tell my friends.*

[…] I haven't had too many problems, but if I have, I'll call my mom and dad.

[…] My housemate helps and solves problems.

Students do not have any problems with the local craftsmen in Zonguldak, and they find their approach good. These can be seen from the statements below:

[…] they treat me the same way as the Turks.

[…] I do not see anything bad.

[…] they treat well.

Students consider Zonguldak as small, quiet, cozy, and ideally suited for them. These can be seen from the statements below:

[…] small city, transportation is easily available.

[…] quiet, small, clean, no one is harming anyone.

[…] Zonguldak is a student city. If you want to have a university education, you have all the facilities.

Under the theme of the application process, there were two sub-themes like documents and process and reasons for ZBEUN (see Figure 3). Few students find the application, stationery, and document process necessary and easy. These can be seen from the statements below:

[…] process is easy, documents required are necessary.

[…] A boyfriend of my sister carried out this process and made an official application on my behalf.

Students' preference for Zonguldak results from its acceptance potential, being students' grades enough for this university and it has a suitable department for them. These can be seen from the statements below:

[…] as I am accepted.

[…] because of my grades.

[…] because my department is %100 English.

Under the themes of school life, there were two sub-themes which are problems and academic achievement (See Figure 3). Students solve their official problems with the students' affairs and the head of department. These can be seen from the statements below:

[…] students' affairs, the head of the faculty solves our problems.

[…] they help us, students' affairs.

[…] students' affairs, we apply for the head of the department.

Most of the students think that their academic performance as good and successful, and they look at their academic performance with the hope of being better. These can be seen from the statements below:

[…] actually, I am good. I hope it will be better if I focus on myself and lectures more.

[…] I'm successful, but I'm having difficulties because I don't study very much, but I'm successful, nonetheless.

[…] my academic performance is good. I have been here for 2 years. We have learned both English and Turkish.

Under the theme of plans for the future, there were two sub-themes like staying in Türkiye and going abroad (See Figure 3). Students prefer either staying in Türkiye or going abroad. These can be seen from the statements below:

[…] I will go abroad. I like traveling.

[…] I want to go to Canada.

[…] I am thinking about going abroad if I become a Turkish citizen I may stay here.

[…] I'll stay here. I've given my years. There's a war there. I can't go back. Instead of going somewhere else and suffering from inexperience, I would rather stay here in Türkiye.
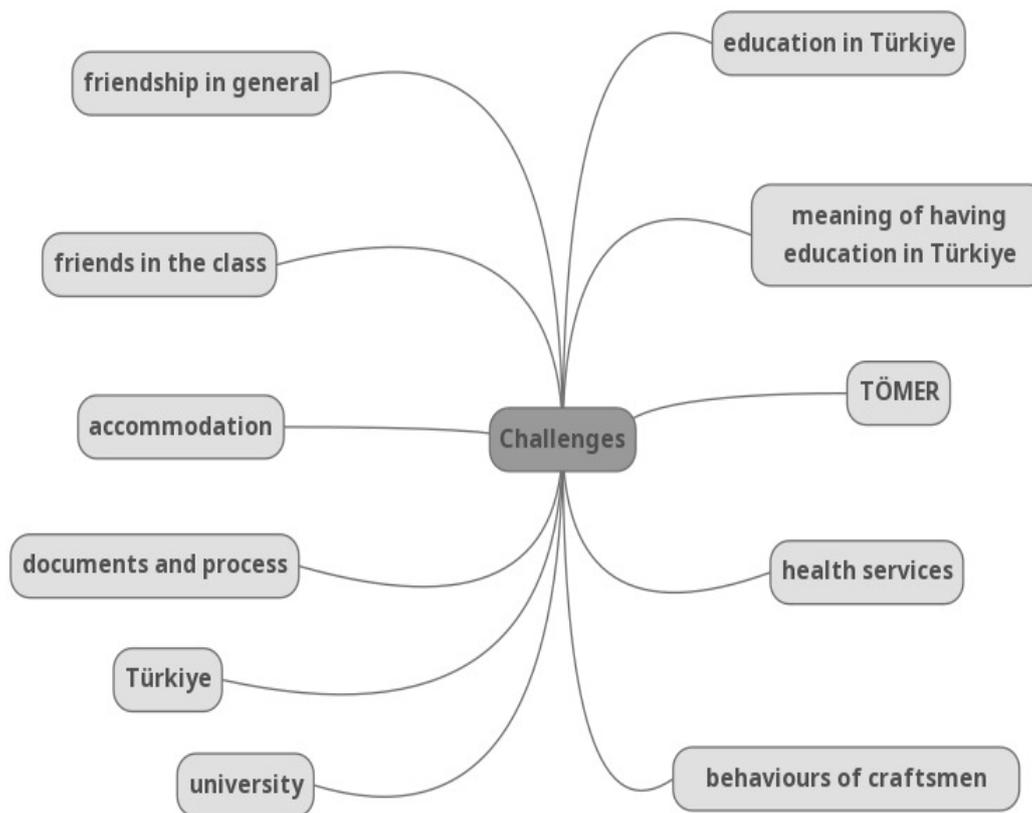

Figure 4. Sub-themes of the challenges theme

As a last theme, researchers determined the theme challenges. As it can be seen in Figure 4, under this theme, education in Türkiye, the meaning of having education in Türkiye, TÖMER, health services, behaviors of craftsmen, friendship in general, friends in the class, accommodation, documents and process, Türkiye and university were determined as sub-themes.

Few students took a poor view of their expectations from having an education in Türkiye. Their expectations were low or education in Türkiye did not meet their expectations. Also, they mentioned education is hard and school fees are high. These can be seen from the statements below:

[…] I was expecting it to be like Europe. Life is expensive. I made a good decision for the university, but I am still struggling with something inside me. Lots of expenditure.

[…] I would expect better. I looked here location was good. I thought good and rich people were living but I had a reverse situation.

[…] Education system is really hard.

[…] school fees are expensive.

Few students are not satisfied with TÖMER education. The reason of the displeasure was attributed to online lectures or some other reasons. These can be seen from the statements below:

[…] I got TÖMER education but there was not enough practice.

[…] I got TÖMER education in Zonguldak but I completed it in Balıkesir. It was online and not fruitful as it was in face to face. To me, education is low in TÖMER. I do not get any help from TÖMER currently, but I study its books.

Students' views about health services in hospitals are in the direction of language. They say if you do not have Turkish, it is not easy to tell your problems. They insistently require translators at hospitals. These can be seen from the statements below:

[…] when I was not able to speak Turkish, I used to suffer from not being able to tell my problems. I used to take my father with me. When I learnt, I have no difficulty.

[…] you have difficulties in state hospitals, nurses are talking on the move you can't understand anything.

[…] I have not been sick, but I am sick I go and say this this this they give me medicine. There must be translators at hospitals. You are right we are the guests here we have to learn Turkish, but it is important for the tourists also.

[…] I didn't go to the hospital, but once I took a friend with me because my Turkish was not well.

Some students are bothered with the attitudes of the local craftsmen. They are complaining about the weird questions they are asking or their inquisitiveness.

[…] as Zonguldak is a small city, students are more than local people. In fact, local craftsmen bear the burden with students. I have never been in a close relationship with the local craftsmen and will never be.

[…] they are asking where we are from, our nationality because of our complexion it makes us frustrated.

Few students complained about their friendship in general in a few respects. Here are the statements related to these:

[…] while I was talking to my Arab friends, Turks grow suspicious about whether we are talking about them or not. It is not good.

[…] Turks are different from us. They make us feel alienated. They ask the reason for our migration. I am generally with foreigners.

[…] I am in a dilemma when I talk to Turks. Arabs say you sold us down the river when I talk to Arabs, Turks say the same.

Some international students talked lowly about their classmates. They complained about the exclusion they faced. Here are the statements related to these:

[…] at first, they were aloof I was excluded a little bit.

[…] I do not have any expectations from them.

[…] males are better. Females have jealousy. I can't say either bad things for all of them or good.

Some students had difficulty in finding a house, and they said that finding a house is an irksome thing. Here are the statements related to these:

[…] finding a house is really difficult. Expensive. I was worried about not being able to find a house.

[…] many students rented a house earlier. I was late, I stayed in a dormitory and then a guy helped me to find a house. I am staying in a house now.

[…] finding a house is a really difficult task. I wandered around to find. I could not find it. Then, I stayed with my friend. I left there, and now we are staying with 3 people in a house.

[…] it was a sad story. I did not know anyone, I wrote to a group on WhatsApp. I stayed in a mosque. Later, they wanted a housemate and I accepted. I am staying at a house now.

[…] I found a house through real estate agents. They require more money as we are foreigners.

Some students find the documents process difficult and regard it as so much paperwork. Here are the statements related to these:

[…] process is difficult, and documents are required, notary is expensive.

[…] process is difficult I quarreled with the guy there.

[…] process is difficult they require C1 Turkish for example.

Students also had difficulty in the adaptation process in Türkiye with regard to language and other problems. Here are the statements related to these:

[…] there was racism. I learned Turkish and racism decreased. Language made me closer to the culture. Making jokes could be misunderstood.

[…] it was very difficult. I was not working I began to work. Nothing is easy in Türkiye.

[…] everything was working I worked and worked later on education issues. I learnt Turkish.

[…] at first, it was difficult. I was far away from my family. It took a year to get used to. People were insulting.

[…] I did not understand the language. It was difficult to understand people and request something from them and come to Zonguldak, find a house, and make friends.

As for the challenges during the adaptation to university, some students had difficulty in getting used to the university. They attributed most of the difficulties, again primarily to language. Here are the statements related to these:

[…] it was difficult, but I got used to it. I have never been in such environments before.

[…] it was difficult, but I got over by talking to people.

[…] as I did not have a language it was difficult.

[…] at first, I could not get used to my responsibilities were a lot, I wanted to give up, I had problems. I felt helpless. But fortunately, I did not give up.

To sum up, after analyzing the data, researchers collected the themes under the headings of feelings, expectations,

benefits, circle of friends, adaptation, the application process, school life, plans for the future, and challenges. It was seen that most of the students have positive thoughts for all the themes except for the challenges. The most challenging part seems to be the health services, finding an accommodation, document process, and adaptation of Türkiye and the university.

Discussion

In this study, the findings obtained from the opinions of the international students are covered under the themes of feelings, expectations, benefits, circle of friends, adaptation, the application process, school life, plans for the future, and challenges. In accordance with the determined sub-themes of these themes, students' opinions have been analyzed.

Discussion Regarding the Feelings Theme

Alienation, tension, ambition, getting used to school, and family were determined as the sub-themes of feelings theme. Students had various feelings. They felt lonely, alienated and tense at the first day of their school life. As they mentioned, these may also stem from being far away from their family and fear of not having friends in their new life of education. As Poyrazlı and Lopez (2007) mentioned that due to linguistic and cultural barriers, international students may find it more difficult to adapt to their new circumstances. As a result, they may think about and miss their family and friends back home. As the students found some solutions, for example by making friends and as time went by, those feelings fade away gradually. This may mean that these feelings are natural, temporary feelings and can be coped with easily. If these feelings are kept more, regardless of reason, higher levels of this kind of feeling may hinder students' assimilation into their new school environment. However, the main motive to exterminate these feelings seems to be friendship. The study made by Aslan and Babirzade (2020) also proves this. They mentioned that homesickness is soothed by international students if they have good friendships. It has also been determined that they are homesick due to communication and adaptation problems. In this case, building a strong friendship environment for international students has considerable value.

Discussion Regarding the Expectations Theme

Education in Türkiye, meaning of having education in Türkiye, and previous knowledge about Türkiye were determined as the sub-themes of expectations theme. Students' most prominent reason to choose Türkiye for education is the quality and the value of its diploma. Students regard Turkish universities diploma's extremely important and valuable, both for them and their country. In other words, the data demonstrates that academic and educational quality significantly affects students' satisfaction and forms the meaning of what education in Türkiye means to them in their minds. This means that Türkiye may have succeeded to illustrate its reputation as a developing country throughout the global world in respect of its education system. This shows partial parallelism with Altbach and Knight (2007) who underlined that countries try to attract international students to their institutions to raise the standard and diversity of the student body, boost their reputation, and earn income. Countries like China, Malaysia, and India which develop strategies to draw students' attention and to export educational programs and institutions (Altbach & Knight, 2007), Türkiye

may be in line or already in the same situation as these data were collected from a university student positively located in a small city. This may think us that the universities in large cities already have a good number of qualified students, but the ones in small cities work considerably harder to draw academics and competent students' attention. Students in big cities may have chosen their universities more knowledgeably as they probably have more fame and popularity than the other ones in the ranks. Also, it is possible that students may have knowledge about the universities and their facilities word of mouth or on the grapevine from previous students' experiences. In addition, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) found that one factor affecting students' decisions was other students' prior experiences in a social environment where they had studied or had engaged with a certain country and/or university. They also added that strong alumni can be a good source of reference for educational institutions. Besides these, some students regarded the meaning of education in Türkiye expensive and not as qualified as in Europe. This may result from students' being in Türkiye since high school times and coming across some problems during their education life. However, it is pleasing to see that students regard university education in a small city as valuable.

Students somehow have previous knowledge about Türkiye beforehand. Before coming, they mentioned that they generally had this previous knowledge from Ottoman Empire, books, films and TV series or the Turks' famous in their country. As Kaya and İnan (2019) underscored, there are some elements influencing how individuals view other nations. The information gained from textbooks and teachers, especially throughout a student's primary school education, is arguably among the most essential variables impacting these attitudes. Additionally, among the elements influencing students' perceptions of foreign nations are the media, social media, and their families and friends. It is also obvious from the study of Livas (2015) indicating more than 100 articles that appeared in the Middle East Media in a 12-month period (printed, electronic, TV and radio) are somehow related to Türkiye or referred to Türkiye in one way or another. This proves that the Middle East or developing countries are in the flux of media about Türkiye and students are getting information about Türkiye inevitably or incidentally. This may have also aroused curiosity among young people about Türkiye in terms of education.

Discussion Regarding the Benefits Theme

Students like their university as it presents them with many opportunities like easy acceptance, friendship, qualified lecturers, and a lovely location. These thoughts can be associated with emotional engagement which can be described as psychological engagement and covers emotional reactions, including interests and values concerning students' attitudes toward their peers, lecturers, courses, and classes, and is presumed to create ties to an institution and influence willingness to do the work (Fredricks et al. 2004). Communication and ties between students and lecturers are important issues for international students' engagement in various aspects. This is because students may feel less secure and feel emotionally fragile if they cannot receive enough interest both from their lecturers and peers (Alpaydın, 2018). Most of the students did not attend TÖMER education and the ones attending TÖMER were pleased with the course given, although some of them did not find TÖMER education fruitful. Aydın (2017) attributed this to international students' negative

perception of the Turkish language. Yılmaz (2018) mentioned in her article that Turkish courses are inadequate as they teach daily language. However, the Turkish language used in lectures as an academic language is different from the daily usage of Turkish. Thus, the teaching of Turkish must be improved and tailored to the academic requirements of international students. Students also complained about the insufficiency of lessons during online education. These findings are also parallel with the results of Şengül (2021) as she found the motivation of the students to learn Turkish decreased during this process and that they watch movies/videos/songs in the target language the most to increase the motivation of the students. It has been found that students most often experienced problems caused by internet connection, technical equipment, and digital literacy deficiencies during the Turkish language teaching process to foreigners remotely.

Discussion Regarding the Circle of Friends Theme

Friendship in general, friendship in the class, communication with the friends in hometown, and academic tips for the friends in hometown were determined as the sub-themes of the circle of friends theme. Students at first have some problems with both their friends in general and friends in their classes. Some of them had unproblematic relationships with both sides. Some students prefer to talk to Turks, some prefer to talk to foreigners, and some do both. Some students still keep in touch with their friends in their hometown, some do not. As it was mentioned above, the concept of friend and friendship was the most prominent finding in this study. Aslan and Babirzade (2020) found striking results about friendship in their research. Most of the students soothe their homesickness and nostalgia for their families with the help of their circle of friends. The ones who do not have a circle of friends cannot concentrate on their lessons and have a longing for their family and friends in their hometown. Some international students have no difficulty in making friends and adaptation problems thanks to this. The expansion of international students' circles of friends depends on the language. The more they learn Turkish the more various friends they have. Students' dilemma of talking to which side is also depicted in the study of Gebru and Yuksel-Kaptanoğlu (2020) who found that this dilemma results from language skills. International students are unable to socialize and make friendships with their Turkish counterparts due to language barriers. Students are also faced with discrimination and hesitation at the first steps of friendship; however, they gradually cope with it. This finding is parallel with the findings of similar studies (Alpaydın & Koyuncu, 2022; Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016; Yılmaz et al., 2020). Studies related to home country friendships of students show that they talk to old friends or do not talk for one way or another reason. Hendrickson et al. (2011) found that international students tend to have more friends in the host nation rather than in their home country as they feel more satisfied, content, and less homesick. Moreover, international students who reported more variation in their friendships with people from the host nation also said they felt more satisfied, happier, and more connected to their social networks. Ng et al. (2018) also reported that feeling dissociated from friends and relatives who had been a major source of support in the transition. They became more susceptible to loneliness as a result, which prevented adaptability. During their university years, students' preference to talk whether with local friends, foreigners or both groups changes. It may have various reasons, for example, a mixed nationality friendship while in Türkiye, may allow the participants to appreciate and discuss the similarities and differences among other foreign exchange students (Ateş, 2019). This may also stem from cultural similarities. According to Ogbu (1991), friends who share similar cultures can give each other the emotional support they need while they adjust to a new environment and frequently struggle to communicate in a second language. Additionally, when necessary, they can provide shelter to negotiate with the negative impacts of prejudice and insight of the dominant culture. Students also mentioned exclusion or discrimination, which was also found in some of the previous studies (Uğurlu & Tosun, 2021; Wenhua & Zhe, 2013). The most important part was that students did not mention any discrimination made by their instructors. Most students complained about the discrimination made by their friends, yet it decreased or faded away as time went by. Other researchers also observed the same thing (Kardeş & Akman, 2022; Can, 2021). It is not surprising to come across such things as they occur among faculty members in academic mobility. Seggie and Çalıkoğlu (2023) found that faculty members in Türkiye also used the word foreigner (yabancı) in an excluding manner for their international colleagues. Although some students are delighted with the attitudes of their classmates, some had the feeling of exclusion without any specific reason. In the study of Aykan and Dursun (2021), students mentioned that they were excluded by their classmates as they heard of their acceptance to universities easily and without the same exam that Turkish students have. Besides, this exclusion is not reflected directly but as a fit of jealousy when Turkish students learned about international students' rights (Kondakçı et al., 2023). Students in this study may have felt these and mentioned exclusion. Students regard themselves respecting academics, either successful or unsuccessful, but they have the belief that if they keep studying and concentrate more, they will have the achievement they want. It is asserted that international students have more academic problems than native students (Furnham, 2004). Here, students assessed themselves from their point of view and did not complain about any system or thing that affected their academic progress. This might be a result of their first year in college. As they will have been integrated increasingly during their school years, their performance would also improve and their academic adjustments would be better (Rienties et al., 2012). In some studies, academic performance is mostly attributed to language proficiency and communication. Some other factors may fade away, but language, especially academic language, seems to be a permanent problem for academic achievement, lack of proper Turkish and not being able to put knowledge or information down on paper may have a remarkable effect on academic success (Nazir & Özçiçek, 2022; Yükselir, 2018). So, students' not fully positive views on their academic achievement may be attributed to the aforementioned factors. However, their determination to complete their education, and their average success despite studying hard, all difficulties are praiseworthy.

Some students are still in touch with their friends in their home country, some are not. They generally talk about their daily routines and school life with their home country friends. Most students are in touch with their friends in their hometown. This may be because of the feeling of clinging to home country friends for some reason. For example, Briscoe et al. (2022) found that American students have superficial conversations with international students. Americans do not

talk about American football or something peculiar to international students. They have curiosity about their previous life before coming to the USA. So, it can be inferred that international students may tend to have a chat or heart-to-heart talk with their friends in their home country after a long day. Apart from this, having a frequent connection to "home" let people who are away from their country of origin stay current on news, social trends, and cultural norms, but they can also heighten feelings of loneliness or longing (Sinanan & Gomez, 2020). The ones who do not talk to their friends may not want to boost the feeling of loneliness and longing. It can be said that friendship between the host country and the home country can be regarded as a devil and deep blue sea.

Students prefer to have an education in Türkiye and their current small university for their home country friends. However, in addition to the students' enthusiasm and their classmates' keen interest in the education in Turkey, some students also awaken them by emphasizing some of the difficulties they face in the educational system. The Turkish education system seems to be one of the prior factors affecting students negatively, as it is different from their studying habits. However, students get used to heavy courses and the education system over the years (Yılmaz et al., 2020). Students may have stated the hardness of the Turkish education system, as they have been caught unprepared before coming here. Uddin et al. (2017) associated this with self-preparation and satisfaction. They mentioned that self-preparation is quite important for international students' satisfaction with the education system. Generally, this preparation and satisfaction are again related to the language barrier. It is mentioned so many times by international students that students who have a desire to come to Türkiye for education must learn Turkish well. This is also in congruent with previous studies (Özoğlu et al., 2015; Titrek et al., 2016). Despite these things, international students never give up preferring Türkiye to their friends. This is also parallel with the study of İnce and Koçak (2018).

Discussion Regarding the Plans for Future Theme

Staying in Türkiye and going abroad were the two sub-themes of plans for future theme. Going abroad is a charming idea after graduation for some of the students, however some of them still prefer to stay in Türkiye after graduation. Both ideas can be reshaped for both sides in the following years as they are in a preparatory class. They may compare the higher education system in Türkiye to their own country and assess the pros and cons of both systems. This may lead them to change their idea of going abroad or staying in Türkiye after graduation. For example, in their study, Kingston and Foreland (2008) mentioned East Asian students' comparison of the higher education system with the UK's higher education system. Asian students say that in their hometown they are passive recipients and teachers load them with knowledge however, in the UK teachers give us a spoon and teach us to how to feed ourselves with knowledge. This teaching and learning systems are regarded by East Asian students as active, open, and attractive. One factor that may affect the idea of staying here can be learning the Turkish language thoroughly during their education. The more they learn Turkish the more desire of serving to their host country may arise. This dilemma seems to be experienced by all international students around the world as similar situations are seen in previous research (Süoğlu, 2012; İlhan et al., 2012).

Discussion Regarding the Adaptation, Application Process, School Life, and Challenges Themes

This study indicated that some students easily found a shelter, but some did not. Generally, close friends help them find a house. As for the ones who had some difficulties, they complained about the prices or being late for renting a house. Surprisingly, nearly all students stay in a house, not in a dormitory. This result contradicts with the study of Zavalsız and Gündağ (2017) who conducted a study in a close region to Zonguldak, while it is parallel with the study of Kiraz (2014). In their study, international students mentioned that they mostly stay in the dormitories as the landlords do not rent a house to them or due to expenses. However, most of the students did not have difficulty in finding a shelter. Kiraz (2014) mentioned that most of the students stay in a house with their friends, including 5–7 people. According to Smith et al.'s (2007) study on international students in Australian universities, most of the situation seems to be the same in Türkiye for the international students. According to Smith et al. (2007), renting a house is too elusive to obtain or too expensive. Additionally, it might be challenging for overseas students to get the paperwork needed to lease rental houses, such as proof of income or rental references.

Some students find the documentation process and its paperwork unnecessary, and some students find it necessary. One student had quarrels with the person in charge, and some others complained about the requirements. Although students complained about the documentation process respecting only a burden task, some hoax cases are likely to encounter. For example, in their study, Yabanova and Özerbaş (2020) underscored striking problems during the placement of international students. These are: fake documents, translation problems, unconfirmed documents, distrust among institutions' deeds for international students' exams (FSE), keeping empty quotas, record deletion and preference limits and special skill exam problems. It can be regarded as a normal thing for international students not to be able to attain their documents from the country they left because of war or any other reasons which made them act precipitately. They leave the formal documents behind in their home country that are required as proof of their academic achievements, such as certified diplomas, transcripts, and attestations, which are sometimes difficult to get from embassies in the host nations. These things mentioned above may have made things hard for international students. A language certificate was also mentioned by one student. Turkish requirement at the C1 level was found unnecessary by him/her. However, Kurum and Erdemli (2021) found that students not having a certificate for language proficiency are enrolled in a prep class for a year, which seems ineffective as language problems occur in the following years. Therefore, the requirement of language criteria and its proof play an important role in the international students' education life in Türkiye.

Students seemed not to have a cross-cultural shock. In fact, they seemed to be got used to Turkish culture when their statements about cultural differences were taken into consideration. They mostly say food and cuisine are different, and they are not used to women and men together in society, and some found marriage ceremonies similar and familiarity of religion too. Students found even the bread consumption rate was different. Food and cuisine difference were also mentioned by the international students as well in the study of Gebru and Yuksel-Kaptanoğlu (2020). According to research

conducted by Snoubar (2017), 91.29% of international students consider Turkish culture close or very close and 80.7% of the students used common methods like making friends to learn more about the culture. It is also worth mentioning that similarities and differences differ from region to region. So, it is probable to experience cultural shock or familiartiy depending on the origins of the international students. For example, Güngör (2015) revealed that students from Turkic Republics differ from us in terms of their general knowledge, language, and accommodation; students from the Middle East differ from in terms of their pace of life, values, friendships, communication styles and political ideology; however, they were similar based on the experiences of customs, religious beliefs, food and life standard. Students from the far east differ from in terms of clothing, daily life, food, religious beliefs, family life, values, cultural activities, language, and perceptions of Turkish people about their culture while they are similar in terms of their recreational activities, accommodation, friendships, perceptions about Turkish culture, and social customs and African students differ from Turkish culture in terms of clothing, food, standard of living, recreational activities, self-identity, family life, friendships, cultural activities, language, political ideology, and social customs however they were similar to religious beliefs, accommodation, and perceptions about Turkish people.

As students mostly have been staying here in Türkiye for a long time, they were able to explain their health problems in hospitals, while newcomers had difficulty in doing so. However, students still require a translator in hospitals, not only for them but also for the tourists visiting Türkiye. Most students mentioned that they tell their problems easily, but it is because of their Turkish language skills, if one does not have the language sufficiently, they will encounter some problems in hospitals. It is said that numerous issues also affect Turkish healthcare professionals. Long-term and extremely intense services, language barriers, and conflicts with patients over cultural differences and violence are a few of them (Turkish Medical Association 2016: 14). So, it can be inferred that as the number of doctors and nurses who can speak English or Arabic increases or the interpreters trained for health sectors pressed into service, this problem may arrive at a solution. Students in our study generally mentioned that they did not get sick, or they went to the hospital rarely. This may be consistent with the findings of previous studies (Masai et al., 2021; Titrek et al., 2016). Their findings showed that when students were ill, they were hesitant to go to the hospital. However, 75% of those surveyed said they would call an ambulance if they thought they might have COVID-19 or another virus that was a public health problem. Students also minor their health problems and try to receive treatment when they think they went down with a serious illness.

Some students are aware of the existence of student offices for international students, some are not. Some students are pleased with the offices, and some still prefer to convey their problems via WhatsApp or other organizations. The contribution of these offices to international students cannot be denied. These offices provide support for almost all international and academic issues and affairs by promoting its programs and assistance. They also have guidance from all phases of students' academic and social conduct such as the application process, course selection, and sheltering opportunities, through orientation programs and cultural trips (Collins et al., 2022). Some students stated that they received good service from the office in their campus and some did not. This result is consistent with the result of Yılmaz (2017). She found that 70% of the students found their offices adequate and satisfactory. However, the staff was found inadequate and dissatisfactory by the students, both from state and private universities. She also emphasized that these offices are inadequate for solving students' academic matters. It can be understood that students may have found offices insufficient in academic matters, and that was the reason they preferred students' groups or other organizations to make themselves heard. One reason for students not to get service from offices can be attributed to not having a counseling service. The offices may be successful in providing other required services except counseling. For example, Kaniki and Kaniki (2021) conducted a study with international students in China and found that students utilize from the offices for issues like course registration, visa application and so on but not for counselling. Students also mentioned that the students' affair office solves their problems at once at school. These may be the primary reasons for our students not to prefer the student office.

Academically, students regard themselves as successful and hope that their academic achievement will improve. It should be borne in mind that students in this study are at the tertiary level language prep classes. That is to say, a year-long English learning can be easy for them as they have had some language learning experience like Turkish, so they may have assessed their academic success as successful taking only one lesson into consideration. For example, Ellialti and Batur (2021) found that listening skills are the most important skills for academic success. They do not find listening difficult. However, they mention that they can only understand the gist of what they listen to and nothing more and are bad at note-taking as they do not know how to concentrate on lectures. When these are taken into consideration, students can be lucky as they are in prep class and used to having such listening training to learn English which will be useful for them in their faculty life. One of the factors for evaluating themselves as successful students and being full of hope for their academic success can be finding Türkiye and its education system, schools, and peers more qualified than their home country's education system, schools, and peers. In their study, Dustmann et al. (2012) found that school and peer quality is relatively the main determinant of immigrants. So, this can support the idea above.

Students found Zonguldak as a small, cozy, peaceful, and student friendly city with available inner-city transportation. Surprisingly, students thought positively about Zonguldak as young people generally think negatively about small cities. This may result from the number of international students and the safety of the city and the facilities the city offers for the students. As Zonguldak lies along the sea line with a sea viewed campus, this must attract students as they have a chance to watch the scenery after classes with coffee. Despite buses and minibuses are elusive in the early hour of the evening, students find public transport convenient. As it mostly happens in all small cities, friendship is also strong among students in Zonguldak. You can hear from students that "the city can be small, but friendships are big in this city". So, once students are involved in a good circle of friends, they may not care about the other negative things in the city they come across. It can be said that the preference of cities varies depend on the real-life experience in those cities or the quality of the friends. However, most of the students in this study are from

Arab countries, preferences of students may vary according to their ethnicities. As it was mentioned in Eskişehir example by Karakaya-Özyer and Yıldız (2019), African students take living conditions such as low cost of living, safety, and social life of the city into consideration, while for the Asians the quality of education comes to the forefront, and Arab students choose Eskişehir, based on their social environments' advice and the European students choose the city taking job opportunities after their graduation.

As for the local tradesmen's attitude towards international students. Some students especially white ones do not have any trouble with the local tradesmen in Zonguldak however Africans have some issues because of the weird questions about their complexion. Except for all these, they do not receive any bad attitude from the local tradesmen. This inquisitive approach from the tradesmen can be attributed to their lack of experience and interaction with people coming from Africa before. As Zonguldak has newly opened its doors for international students, both local people and tradesmen will get used to living with differences and diversity of people from every race and ethnicity as time goes by.

Conclusion and Recommendations

All in all, international students either as a migrant, a refugee or an exchange program member will spend lots of years in our country and our schools. Governments and institutions have recognized how valuable contributions international students can be to the host country with respect to the economy and higher education. Moreover, Türkiye is on the way to be one of the most attractive and accessible destinations for students all around the world besides surrounding regions.

This study revealed that international students' primary reason for choosing Türkiye for education are the Turkish education system and its diploma as a powerful tool to get a job or be a well-educated person. The study revealed that students hear about education in Türkiye and its cities by word of mouth or advice of their friends. In this context, Zonguldak City and ZBEÜ can be considered convenient for international students according to the data obtained. Although Zonguldak lacks social activities for young people, its nature takes precedence over social life in the eyes of students. The campus with a sea view and its closeness to the city center and recreation places, facilities in the campus like a 24-hours open library and study saloons, cafes and dorms located inside the campus attract students significantly. Students have a chance to walk by the seaside and sit, chat and study at cafes looking out on the sea are some of the facilities that the students have. Besides the cozy atmosphere of the city, Zonguldak is also geographically close to Ankara, İstanbul, Düzce, Bolu, Sakarya and tourist attraction places like Amasra and Safranbolu. Zonguldak. The city has well behaved local people and tradesmen, sufficient dormitories, green living places, etc. Thanks to these, Zonguldak compensates for its lackings such as transportation at late hours, social life, trains or coaches, and some other things big cities have.

When looked at from the social perspective, it is seen that the concept of friendship has the foremost importance among international students and locals, as it always has been all around the world. Students rely on their friends more than anything and stuck together through thick and thin, both in good times and in bad and in sickness and in health. International students seem to solve all their problems with the help of their friends either from their own countries or Türkiye. Thus, friendship among both international students and host

country students should be bolstered by organizing mega official student gathering events a couple of months after schools' openings. This may pave the way for socializing and being intimate with new friends more quickly for both sides. Having strong friendships may also soothe the homesickness and longing for friends in home countries. In this case, creating a good circle of friends is a very important issue for every international student.

This study also revealed that small city universities are also preferable to international students. Both university rectors and municipalities must be aware of this opportunity and shoulder the duty in collaboration. For example, municipalities can provide more transportation options and sheltering facilities or organize the environment of the city and recreation centers of the cities, etc.

Students may have the risk of some discrimination practices from the country or the city they are in due to many reasons such as religion, ethnicity, or cultural differences. In order to reduce this negative experience, local students may have some trainings beforehand by the specialist to learn how to live with international students and not to be biased with the international students in their classes because this situation may be worrying for both sides. For the sake of students' comfort in general, a smooth, and welcoming atmosphere in which they can communicate with one another can be provided by training the local students or both periodically. This will also prevent both sides from being friends with their own parties, limited interactions with each other and groupings. Moreover, international students staying in houses in preference to dormitories may also be attributed to this situation above too.

Students are really pleased with their academic staff as if they have been teaching to them for years. It seems that Turkish hospitality shows itself in an academic environment as the students are happy with their lecturers' warm attitude to them both academically and socially. This positive relationship will also help students to speed up their academic adjustment together with social adjustment. The more they are academically adjusted the more they will be socially adjusted. It also seems that as international students keep attending Turkish universities, ties between international students and lecturers will positively improve.

Although international students know that there is an office for them, they do not prefer to apply there to solve the issues they have. They seem to have involved in students' groups that they hope to represent them. The reason of this could be investigated deeply in other research to find out whether the students could not express their needs to executive bodies, or they feel free among their students' groups than administrative bodies. If the former is true, students must be more informed about the students' offices and guided to these offices to solve their issues more officially and quicker.

Türkiye can fulfill its aim of becoming a worldwide hub for education and research in the field of higher education. On the one hand, Türkiye has made higher education more accessible to its citizens; on the other hand, it has launched several programs intending to become an important worldwide hub in the international higher education network. All things considered, international students are aware of the quality of education in Türkiye and its universities in some way or other before coming to Türkiye. Even if they do not know anything, it is for sure that they will learn by mouth of word or thanks to the internet, etc. Needless to say, Türkiye has already been considered by many as an attractive destination for

international students because it is both closer and similar to home, easier to travel due to its visa requirements, cheaper than many other popular students' nations, and more importantly most people have already some relative ties here. As a result, there will be a continuous flux of international students into Türkiye in the following years. So as a country and higher education institute, we should work meticulously to satisfy these students with regard to both education and other facilities. This also should be considered as a tourism mobility as well as education mobility. Even small cities like in this study must take some steps to meet the international students' need not only as campus but also as city government. This study showed that students have some adaptation problems and challenges during their first period or at the very beginning of their education life, which cease in time. To conclude, from the governmental part to the bottom, from the top institutions to the lowest, from the biggest cities to the smallest ones all the regulations, measures, activities, events, projects, etc. must be on behalf of the integration of international students and local students and implemented scrutinously as the integration and friendship seem to be the key panacea to the problems and challenges occurring in a foreign place.

Author Contributions

All authors took an equal part in all processes of the article. All authors have read and approved the final version of the study.

Ethics Declaration

This study was conducted with the approval decision taken at the Ethics Committee for Human Research in Social Sciences (Protocol No. 269) of Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University, dated 29.06.2022.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declare that there is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of the study.

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