

Studying Abroad: Experiences of International Students in a Turkish University

Yurtdışında eğitim: Bir Türk üniversitesinde uluslararası öğrenci deneyimleri

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Özet

Küreselleşmenin ekonomi politiği yükseköğretim alanında da önemli dönüşümleri beraberinde getirmekte, yükseköğretimde bir paradigma değişiminden söz edilmektedir. Bu dönüşümün odağında uluslararasılaşma yer almakta, uluslararası eğitim sektörü kapsam ve içerik açısından hızlı bir gelişme göstermektedir. Ancak, yurtdışı eğitim getirilerinin yanı sıra uluslararası öğrenciler açısından birçok zorluğu da bünyesinde barındırmaktadır. Bu nedenle üniversiteler uluslararası öğrencilerin gereksinimlerini gözetmeye ve onları kampus yaşamına dahil etmeye çalışmaktadır. Türkiye de uluslararası öğrenciler için cazibe odağı haline gelmeyi ve bölgesinde bir yükseköğretim merkezi olmayı hedefleyen ülkelerden biridir. Son yıllarda bu kapsamda önemli düzenlemelere gidilmekte, uluslararası öğrencilerin sayısını arttırmak ve aynı zamanda koşullarını iyileştirmek üzere çalışmalar yapılmaktadır. Ancak bu alanda kaydedilen olumlu gelişmelerin yanında sorunlu alanlar da bulunmaktadır. Türkiye'nin yükseköğretim potansiyelini daha iyi kullanabilmesi için uluslararası öğrenciler ile ilgili çalışmaların artırılması, mevcut politikaların bu çalışmalar doğrultusunda güncellenmesi gerekmektedir. Bu çalışmanın amacı da uluslararası öğrencilerin deneyimlerinden yola çıkarak bu alandaki birikime katkı sağlamaktır. Çalışmada Türkiye'de bir devlet üniversitesi olan Süleyman Demirel Üniversitesi'nde 2016 yılında uluslararası öğrencilerle gerçekleştirilen anket uygulamasının bulguları tartışılmakta, öğrencilerin tespitlerine yer verilmekte ve bu doğrultuda öneriler sunulmaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Öğrenci hareketliliği, Türk yükseköğretiminde uluslararasılaşma, uluslararası eğitim, uluslararası öğrenciler, yükseköğretim politikaları, yükseköğretim yönetimi.

Abstract

The political economy of globalization has brought about sweeping transformations in higher education and international education has dramatically expanded in volume, scope and complexity, with globalization being in the center of this transformation. Universities have made various efforts to recruit more international students as a means of generating income and adding diversity to the student body. Turkey is one of these countries attempting to increase international student recruitment and to become a regional center for higher education. In recent years, Turkey has taken important steps in terms of international students to increase the number of international students and also to improve their conditions. Yet, despite the expansion of Turkish higher education and the country's steady path toward its enrolment targets, there are some challenges that need to be addressed. For Turkey to better use its potential in the region, research on international students should be increased and regulations should be adjusted accordingly. In this context, experiences of international students should be researched for analyzing existing situation and designing more appropriate policies. Accordingly, this paper aims to reflect international students' opinions with regard to their experience on studying abroad in Turkey through the findings of a questionnaire carried out in 2016 in a Turkish state university, Süleyman Demirel University.

Keywords: Higher education management, higher education policies, international students, internationalization in Turkish higher education, international education, student mobility, Turkish higher education.

Internationalization has become a major theme in higher education and international education sector has remarkably grown in recent years. During the past two decades, international activities of universities dramatically expanded in volume, scope and complexity. Increasing number of higher

education institutions has incorporated internationalization to their institutional missions as an indicator for quality. One of the performance indicators often used for internationalization is the number of international students enrolled at the institution (de Wit, 2011). In addition to the traditional receiving

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countries, universities in other countries have made various efforts to recruit more international students as a means of generating income and adding diversity to the student body (Altbach & Knight, 2007). As a result, there has been a significant increase in the total number of foreign students in the world since the early stages of international mobility. In the year 2012, the number of students enrolled outside their country of citizenship rose to 4.5 million, which was 2.1 million in 2000 and 0.8 million in 1975^[1] (OECD, 2014, p. 344). Additionally, it was predicted that by the end of 2020, the total foreign student population would rise to 7 million (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009). Thus, it seems that studying abroad will be an exciting experience for more and more students in the future.

In this changing context of student mobility, new trends will have an important impact on campus environments. Along with the increasing enrollment of traditional college students, there will be robust migration of students worldwide and thus campuses will host a more diverse, nontraditional student body. Involvement of international students in campus life is perceived as a precondition for campus internationalization. The presence of international students enriches the environment in the classroom with various experiences and stories from different cultures (Pandit, 2007). Higher education can provide opportunities for cross-cultural interaction and thus develop international and intercultural skills of all students. Yet, researchers agree that this is not an easy task and the realization of the pluralism imperative is the most significant challenge ever faced by higher education (Kuh, 2008, p. 93). Indeed, spontaneous intercultural interaction between international students and their host community is unusual and simply putting people from different cultures into the same place does not lead to internationalization any more than living in the same street creates a community (Thom, 2010, p. 58). Students from different national and cultural backgrounds are often challenged to “voluntarily” socialize. Yet, issues such as social acceptability, academic success, language, and communication skills are, however, persistent influences on the extent to which students can be successful in establishing social and academic relationships across national and cultural borders (de Vita, 2007; Harrison & Peacock, 2010; Sovic, 2009). Factors such as language barriers, lack of familiarity with daily practices, fear of being misunderstood and ignored push international students to form smaller groups are based on language and cultural background (Ippolito, 2007). In general, interna-

tional and domestic students have little contact, which constitutes a significant barrier to internationalization.

Studying abroad involves various processes from application to graduation, even after graduation. Application procedures, visa requirements, accommodation, language, study programmes, staff and students in host institution, campus environment and city are among the factors that all shape the experience on studying abroad. Whilst coming to a new and foreign country is often an exciting and rich event, the experience can be constrained by uncertainty and disorientation of finding your way around new cultures and social expectations. While many students find methods to tackle with these challenges, some of them fail miserably both in the academics and in their social life; beset by financial burdens, depression and a sense of failure (Ramachandran, 2011, p. 202). Thus, there is a growing need for the development of innovative and well-conceptualized programs for promotion, management, and guidance of international students and for creating a multicultural campus environment (Chapman, 1999). In this regard, student voice should seriously be taken into account to adjust policies and regulations in accordance with the special needs of international students.

To date, a few studies were carried out with the international students for understanding the experiences of students on studying abroad in Turkey^[2]. Yet, there is a need for further research to grasp the opinions of international students regarding the recent policy developments. Research with international students should be carried out regularly and kept up to date in order to monitor existing policies and to formulate proper ones. In this regard, this paper is an attempt to contribute to the collection of previous studies in the literature, to provide an additional source of data and recommendations for policy makers by presenting a sample from a large state university, namely Süleyman Demirel University (SDU).

International Student Recruitment in Turkey

Turkey is one of these countries attempting to increase international recruitment and to become a regional center for higher education. The “Grand Student Project” which started in 1992 and provided scholarships to the students from Turkic Republics and Related Communities became a starting point in this manner and led to important developments in terms of international students. Turkish universities have

[1] Data on foreign enrolment worldwide comes from both the OECD and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS). UIS provided the data on all countries for 1975–95 and most of the non-OECD countries for 2000, 2005, 2010, 2011 and 2012. The OECD provided the data on OECD countries and other non-OECD economies in 2000 and 2012. Both sources use similar definitions, thus making their combination possible. Missing data were imputed with the closest data reports to ensure that breaks in data coverage do not result in breaks in time series (OECD, 2014: 344). For more information please see OECD, 2014, p. 344.

[2] see e.g. DEİK, 2016; Özer, 2012; Özoğlu, Gür, & Coşkun, 2012; Snoubar & Celik, 2013; T.C. Kalkınma Bakanlığı, 2015; ÜAK, 2016; YÖK, 2014.



hosted many international students since then. Yet, the number of students that benefited from this program did not record a stable increase in those years and scholarships that had been devoted to Project were not fully employed. In addition, graduation rates of students remained low. Thus, the success of the program was put into question and new policies and regulations have been issued for pursuing a more effective international student strategy from 2010 onwards (Vural Yılmaz, 2014).

In this context, first an institutional reorganization was established. The Office for Turks Abroad and Relative Communities was established in 2010 and international scholarships were put under the responsibility of this Office with the name of Türkiye Scholarships. One of the missions of the Office is determining the principles for successfully conducting the educational procedures of international students deemed worthy of scholarship in Turkey, and maintenance of relationships during and after their education. Türkiye Scholarships offer scholarships for students from all over the world in a wide array of disciplines (Türkiye Scholarships, 2017).

Apart from the scholarships, new regulations have also been passed regarding fee-paying students. Student admission has been left to the universities and application/selection procedures have become easier. To facilitate procedures for international students that want to study in Turkey, the most significant developments were to make no concessions in quality, to remove the central selection examination in 2010 and, in this context to give universities the authority to select their own international students. According to the statistics from that year on, the number of international students has increased, as a central examination system such as the ÖSYM was seen as a deterrent factor for students. The flexibility within this system has started to yield fruit, and this process has accelerated with the project “Study in Turkey”. Turkey developed a project with the brand name “Study in Turkey” and created a platform where all state and private universities have been presented through a mechanism that introduces Turkey’s internationalization strategy. The effort, spearheaded by the Turkish Universities Promotion Agency, a private organisation devoted to attracting students to Turkey, has support across a range of stakeholders in Turkish higher education (Vural Yılmaz, 2014, p. 252).

As for the academic year 2016–2017, the number of international students studying at Turkish universities is 108,076, an increased but insufficient number when potential of the country is taken into account (YBYS, 2017). The top ten sending countries are listed in ■ Table 1.

Syria has the largest number of students in Turkey, followed by Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Afghanistan and Iraq. They are followed by Germany, Greece, Bulgaria and Libya. The number of international students coming from these ten countries constitutes approximately 61% of the total international students in Turkey. Thus, it could be inferred from the data that Turkey receives students mainly from the neighbouring countries and the countries in Central Asia which underlies the rising role of Turkey as a regional center for higher education.

According to data from the Prime Ministry’s International Students Department, Turkey has also increased the amount of international scholarships it awards in an effort to become a global education hub. As for the year 2016, nearly 122,000 applications from 176 countries have been filed, reaching the highest number so far and 15,000 international students enrolled in Turkish universities were funded by the government’s scholarship programs (Türkiye Scholarships, 2017).

Thus, it could be said that Turkey has taken important steps in terms of international students and this led to a trend of increase in international recruitment, in return. Yet, despite the expansion of Turkish higher education and the country’s steady path toward its enrolment targets, there are some challenges that need to be addressed. For Turkey to better use its potential in the region, research on international students should be increased and regulations should be adjusted accordingly. Existing research provide important findings and recommendations regarding international student recruitment in Turkey. The objective of this study is to contribute to this literature through a research into the experiences of international students on studying abroad in a Turkish state university, namely SDU.

■ Table 1. Number of international students in Turkey by nationality.

Country of origin	Number of students
Syria	15,042
Azerbaijan	14,878
Turkmenistan	10,418
Iran	6099
Afghanistan	5251
Iraq	5012
Germany	3755
Greece	2285
Bulgaria	2030
Libya	1943
Total	66,713

Source: 2016–2017 Statistics of Council of Higher Education (YBYS, 2017).



Research Design and Methodology

Turkey has been pursuing an active internationalization policy since 2010s and international student recruitment has been increasing accordingly. Both government and universities work for improving conditions of international students and for supporting them in their academic and social life in Turkey. Yet, there are difficulties that international students face in the process from application to graduation. In order to become a more attractive study abroad destination, experiences of international students should seriously be taken into account, since everyday life provides practical information for improving existing situation. This research was carried out from this perspective and aimed at reflecting international students' opinions with regard to their experience on studying abroad in Turkey.

Survey questions were formed in the light of literature, international student reports and the issues discussed in related national/ international meetings that the researcher participated in. In addition, survey was previewed by Süleyman Demirel University international student office managers and three master degree students and finalized in accordance with their suggestions. Questionnaire was presented in both English and Turkish.

Data for this study were collected between October and December 2016, from a sample of international students studying at Süleyman Demirel University, Isparta, Turkey. As for the year 2016, Süleyman Demirel University has 86,000 students and approximately 76,000 are at undergraduate level. There are 1580 international students at undergraduate level and 500 students at graduate level in the University as of 2016. As for the year 2016, the rank of SDU is 15 (out of 190 universities) with regard to the number of international students among the universities in Turkey (YBYS, 2017). The top 10 sending countries are the same for Turkey and SDU which approximately compose 60% of the international student profile of both. The distribution of the international student composition by nationality for Turkey and for SDU was given in ■ Table 2.

Due to the fact that international students are scattered in different programs, two methods were utilized to reach them. First, questionnaires were administered in the classroom setting by the researcher with the assistance of course lecturers. Yet, due to the difficulty in reaching the students who were divided among 18 faculties and 3 graduate schools and their unwillingness in responding the survey, the number of responses remained limited. Besides, low course attendance rates created another problem in reaching the students face to face. For this reason, the questionnaire was adminis-

tered through a website and an e-mail asking the contribution of international students was sent to e-mail list of all international students through the online student information system of SDU. E-mail was sent in Turkish and English and contained information about researcher, the goal and content of the survey. The students were informed on that the name of the participant was not asked and other personal information (age, country of origin, department, and level of study) would only be used to depict the composition of the sample. Questionnaires were administered using the Survey Monkey web-based software where students could complete the survey online. After a two-month period, 186 returns were gathered which constituted approximately 9% of the international students in SDU.

Due to the difficulty in corresponding to all international students via e-mail, limited participation is the most important limitation of the research. Due to the difficulty in reaching a proper list of the students, in providing face-to-face communication and the unwillingness in participating in the survey, randomized selection could not be done by the researcher. Instead, voluntary participation of international students through internet was carried out to provide wider participation. Besides, survey was designed as a short one with limited number of questions for the sake of simplicity regarding the respondents. This has limited the possibility of a deeper analysis. To compensate this limitation, open-ended questions were put at the end of each section to collect the additional views of the respondents.

Findings

The survey examined the demographic characteristics of international students, the factors influencing choice of

■ **Table 2.** Number of international students by nationality in Turkey and in SDU.

Country of origin	Number of students in Turkey	Number of students in SDU
Syria	15,042	208
Azerbaijan	14,878	261
Turkmenistan	10,418	393
Iran	6099	20
Afghanistan	5251	127
Iraq	5012	203
Germany	3755	41
Greece	2285	3
Bulgaria	2030	13
Libya	1943	25
Total	66,713	1294

Source: Council of Higher Education 2016-2017 Statistics (YBYS, 2017).



Turkey as a study destination, living arrangements, educational experiences, the availability of and satisfaction with institutional services and facilities, social relationships in the campus/town and their future plans. Findings of the study were presented below.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The survey was carried out with the participation of 186 students. Main countries of origin are Turkmenistan, Syria, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Iran, Somalia, and Uzbekistan, which represented the distribution of students in the University (■ Table 3).

Country of origin of the most of the participants (94%-174 participants out of 186) is in line with the top 10 sending countries regarding international students in Turkey with only slight changes. 60% of international student population in Turkey is composed of 10 countries of origin (66,713 out of 108,076). Similarly, 63% of international students in SDU comes from these 10 countries. The demographic composition of the survey respondents also represents the student composition coming from these 10 countries (94%) except Greece which was not represented by any student participated in the survey^[3].

The majority of the participants (86%) were undergraduate students. The students were distributed among various disciplines in the fields of social sciences, (52%), engineering (32%), sciences (11%) and other fields (5%). The participants had spent on average 2.44 years in Turkey at the time the data were collected. Students had information on Turkish universities from mainly four sources respectively: Türkiye Scholarships web page, Study in Turkey web page, universities' web pages and friends.

Living Arrangements

In this section two questions were asked to students to find out where they stay and how they meet their living costs.

International students most frequently resided in rental accommodation (38%) and private student hostels (33%). Students with smaller numbers (29%) stayed in the state dormitories (■ Table 4). There was no student residing with host family in Isparta since there are no mechanisms developed for host family system in Turkey.

Most of international students (68%) reported that they depend on financial support from their families to meet education and living expenses. The ratio of students receiving

scholarships was approximately 23%. While 13% of students received Türkiye scholarships, 10% of students had scholarships from their governments. An important finding is that there was no international student receiving financial support from private associations and NGOs in their home country or in Turkey. Full-time employment rate was very low for international students with 3 postgraduate students. 13% of students reported that they work in part-time jobs (■ Table 5).

■ Table 3. Distribution of the respondents by nationality.

Country of origin	Students in SDU	Survey respondents	Respondents/ Students in SDU
Syria	208	42	20%
Azerbaijan	261	39	15%
Turkmenistan	393	51	13%
Iran	20	3	15%
Afghanistan	127	19	15%
Iraq	203	14	7%
Germany	41	2	5%
Greece	3	0	0%
Bulgaria	13	1	8%
Libya	25	3	12%
Total	1294	174	13%

■ Table 4. Accommodation and residence of international students.

Answer choices	Responses
State dormitory	29.51% (54)
Private student hostel	32.79% (60)
Private rented house/flat	37.70% (72)
Staying with relatives	0.00% (0)
Staying with host family	0.00% (0)

Note: The numbers of the respondents are given in parentheses. The total number of respondents is 186.

■ Table 5. Financial resources to meet living costs.

Answer choices	Responses
Türkiye Scholarships	12.90% (24)
Scholarship from my government	9.68% (18)
Scholarship from a private association in my country	0.00% (0)
Scholarship from a private association in Turkey	0.00% (0)
Support from my family	67.74% (126)
Full-time employment	1.61% (3)
Part time employment	12.90% (24)

Note: The numbers of the respondents are given in parentheses. The total number of respondents is 186.

[3] There are 3 students from Greece in SDU.



Rationales for Choosing Turkey

This question was designed to find out main rationales behind the selection of Turkey as destination country for study abroad. There are some push and pull factors that affect destination country choices of international students. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), defined ‘push’ factors as the factors within the home country which initiate students’ decision to study abroad. Pull factors are the ones that make a country attractive for international study. While push factors generally derive from the socio-economic conditions of the sending country, there are various pull factors within a study destination that make it attractive to international students. Main pull factors that influence student selection of a host country include knowledge and awareness of the host country; the destination’s reputation for quality education; personal recommendations from parents, relatives, friends; cost issues; geographic proximity; study climate and lifestyle of the country; social links with the relatives/friends living in that country. Basing on this study, respondents were asked to present their reasons for choosing Turkey as the destination country (■ Table 6).

Findings reveal that the most significant pull factor for international students is relatively low living expenditure in Turkey. This implies the importance of financial issues on preferences of international students. Although scholarship opportunities were found limited in Turkey (9.84 %), for nearly half of the students lower expenditure level is the most important factor (■ Table 6). In literature, establishment of a scholarship system is regarded as an important factor for international student recruitment. Countries establish scholarships to attract successful students and to have skilled migration. In this research, students did not report scholarship as a strong rationale for choosing Turkey. Second set of rationales is religious and cultural affinity. It is interesting that students give this factor a priority over quality of education. Moreover, existence of friends in Turkey is also more important for international students. Thus, it could be inferred that international students first think about their economic and social conditions rather than educational matters when choosing Turkey as a destination country. This finding has been supported by the statistics of international students in Turkey which reveals that the majority of international students come from neighboring countries and from Turkic Countries.

Difficulties During Study Period in Turkey

International students were asked to assess the level of problems they face during various stages of their study abroad period. The distribution of responses was given in ■ Table 7.

■ Table 6. The most important reasons for choosing Turkey.

Answer choices	Responses
Education in Turkish language	27.87% (51)
Cultural affinity	42.62% (78)
Religious affinity	42.62% (78)
Quality of Turkish Universities	31.15% (57)
Relatively low living expenses	45.90% (84)
Scholarship opportunities	9.84% (18)
Geographical proximity	21.31% (39)
Relatives/friends staying in Turkey	34.43% (63)

Note: The numbers of the respondents were given in parentheses. The total number of respondents is 186.

The average scale values reveal the following results in terms of the most significant problems of international students: The most challenging matter for international students is financial problems with an average of 3.29. Survey findings revealed that most of respondents come from low income countries and most of them (68%) depend on financial support from their families. On the other hand, 13% of students receive Türkiye scholarships.

Another challenging issue arises from the difficulty in participating in the academic discussions (3.24), understanding academic rules (3.23) and engaging in group work with the classmates (3.19). These results imply that there are problems regarding the inclusion of the international students in the courses. The main reason for inadequate inclusion of the students might be the difficulty in understanding and speaking Turkish, since language problems (2.93) and difficulty in understanding lectures in Turkish (2.93) were also rated high. On the other hand, the average value for negative attitudes of lecturers and students are lower (1.96 and 1.80, respectively). Thus, it seems that international students do not feel excluded in the university due to the negative attitudes towards them, but they could not participate in the academic life mostly because of the language barrier.

Accommodation (2.96) was rated nearly as important as the financial problems, participation in the lectures and language barrier. International students have opportunity to stay in state dormitories, yet problems related to the capacity and conditions of these dormitories have been a concern for local students as well. On the other hand, just as the case in many Anatolian cities apartment rents are very high in Isparta. This problem was stated as the most important one by several participants in the open ended questions and comments section of the survey.

Experience on Studying Abroad in Turkey

Next set of questions were designed to find out opinions of students on some matters that shape their experience on studying



Table 7. Difficulties during study period in Turkey.

Please indicate the level of difficulties you face during your study in Turkey	Low (1)	Medium (2)	High (3)	Very high (4)	Average scale value
Problems in getting information before application	11.29% (21)	75.81% (141)	11.29% (21)	1.61% (3)	2.03
Problems related to application process	17.74% (33)	67.74% (126)	12.90% (24)	1.61% (3)	1.98
Problems related to registration process	32.26% (60)	54.84% (102)	11.29% (21)	1.61% (3)	1.82
Problems related to visa procedures	33.87% (63)	38.71% (72)	27.42% (51)	0.00% (0)	2.15
Problems in getting residence permission at the police	12.90% (24)	41.94% (78)	43.55% (81)	1.61% (3)	2.33
Language problems	8.06% (15)	11.29% (21)	46.77% (87)	30.65% (57)	2.93
Financial problems	1.61% (3)	11.29% (21)	43.55% (81)	43.55% (81)	3.29
Accommodation problems	3.28% (6)	18.03% (33)	45.90% (84)	31.15% (57)	2.96
Negative attitudes of people in the city and social exclusion	12.90% (24)	50.00% (93)	30.65% (57)	1.61% (2)	2.09
Negative attitudes of lecturers and social exclusion in the university	24.19% (45)	50.00% (93)	24.19% (45)	0.00% (0)	1.96
Negative attitudes of Turkish students and social exclusion in the university	35.48% (66)	48.39% (90)	16.13% (30)	0.00% (0)	1.80
Difficulty in understanding lectures in Turkish	6.45% (12)	17.74% (33)	45.16% (84)	29.03% (54)	2.93
Difficulty in participating academic discussions	1.61% (3)	17.74% (33)	16.13% (30)	59.68% (111)	3.24
Difficulty in engaging in group work with my classmates.	12.90% (24)	12.90% (24)	16.13% (30)	58.06% (108)	3.19
Difficulty in understanding academic rules and regulations.	11.11% (21)	14.29% (27)	36.51% (69)	31.75% (80)	3.23
Difficulty in seeking the information I need across the university	9.68% (18)	24.19% (45)	46.77% (87)	19.35% (36)	2.75

Note: The level of difficulty was scaled between 1 and 4 (1=low, 4=very high). The numbers of the respondents are given in parentheses. The total number of respondents is 186. The average scale value was given at the end of each response column.

abroad (Table 8). Students were given some statements and asked at which level they agree with those statements.

As for the scholarships, almost half of the students did not find procedures easier compared to other countries. Yet, an important part of participants (41%) did not express any opin-

ion regarding the amount of scholarships. 80% of students stated that they are pleased with the quality of education in general and their expectations were met. Similarly, nearly half of students were pleased with the services of international office. The most problematic areas are Turkish language courses, academ-

Table 8. Experience on studying abroad in Turkey.

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements	Disagree	Partially agree	Agree	No idea
Scholarship conditions are easier in Turkey when compared to other countries	40.32% (75)	17.74% (33)	17.74% (33)	24.19% (45)
Scholarship is adequate in Turkey when compared to other countries	25.81% (48)	14.52% (27)	17.74% (33)	41.94% (78)
I am pleased with the quality of education	1.61% (3)	17.74% (33)	80.65% (150)	0.00% (0)
Turkish courses were adequate for my further studies	56.45% (105)	24.19% (45)	12.90% (24)	6.45% (12)
I have access to counseling services in the university	41.94% (78)	33.87% (63)	24.19% (45)	0.00% (0)
I'm pleased with the services of international office	16.13% (30)	33.87% (63)	45.16% (84)	4.84% (18)
I have access one-on-one academic advising	64.52% (120)	12.90% (24)	8.06% (15)	14.52% (27)
I get support from student representatives in academic and social matters	31.15% (57)	36.07% (66)	27.87% (51)	4.92% (9)
I can express my problems and needs to administration	61.29% (114)	24.19% (45)	11.29% (21)	3.23% (6)
I have strong relations with the academicians	32.26% (60)	56.45% (104)	6.45% (12)	4.84% (9)
I have strong relations with Turkish students	20.97% (39)	59.68% (111)	19.35% (36)	0.00% (0)
I usually meet with other international students	11.29% (21)	3.23% (6)	82.26% (153)	3.23% (6)
I participate in social activities in campus	27.42% (51)	53.23% (99)	11.29% (21)	8.06% (15)
I feel alone and excluded in the campus	14.75% (27)	50.82% (93)	32.79% (60)	1.64% (3)
I would be pleased if special programs with Turkish students are organized	0.00% (0)	12.90% (24)	83.87% (156)	3.23% (6)
I participate in social activities in city center	79.03% (147)	14.52% (27)	3.23% (6)	3.23% (6)
I feel alone and excluded in the city	17.74% (33)	11.29% (21)	70.97% (132)	0.00% (0)
I feel secure in the city center	0.00% (0)	4.84% (9)	88.71% (165)	6.45% (12)
Education in Turkey meet my expectations	3.23% (6)	17.74% (33)	79.03% (147)	0.00% (0)
Social conditions in Turkey meet my expectations	6.45% (12)	37.10% (69)	48.39% (90)	8.06% (15)
I suggest my friends to study in Turkey	3.23% (6)	16.13% (30)	79.03% (147)	1.61% (3)

Note: The numbers of the respondents are given in parentheses. The total number of respondents is 186.



ic advising and attaining to university administration. 56% of students did not find Turkish courses as adequate for their academic life. This finding is in line with the language problems depicted in the previous section. 64% of students reported that they have no one by one academic advice and they partially find their relations with academicians as strong. Again, only 19% of students reported strong relations with other students.

Thus, it seems that although international students are pleased with the quality of education, they have difficulties in participating in the campus life. 53% of international students participate in the social activities in campus and 27% do not. 80% of respondents stated that they have relations with other international students. Thus, findings reveal that international students have not been integrated into campus life enough. 84% of students agreed on the necessity of special activities for integrating Turkish and international students. Respondents gave negative answers regarding participation in city life again. Although 89% of students feel secure in the city, 71% of them feel excluded in the city. Yet, in spite of such negative factors most of the international students find their experience as satisfactory and 79% of students suggest their friends to study in Turkey. Thus, it seems that besides some problems, international students have been satisfied with their overall experience.

The last question focused on the future plans of the international students, since it is also a significant indicator of their satisfaction with the experience on studying abroad and intention for staying in Turkey further (■ Table 9).

When asked about future plans, the majority of students (47%) planned to return their home country. 38% of students stated that they planned to search for employment opportunities, further academic study and academic career in Turkey.

Discussion

In this part of the paper, we discussed the overall findings of the survey under basic topics of living arrangements, academic life, social relations and inclusion.

■ Table 9. Future plans.

What do you plan to do after your current program of study	Responses
Returning to my country	46.67% (76)
Employment in Turkey	25.00% (42)
Further academic study in Turkey	10.00% (18)
Academic career in Turkey	3.33% (6)
Academic career in my country	10.00% (18)
Employment in a third country	3.33% (6)

Note: The numbers of the respondents are given in parentheses. The total number of respondents is 186.

Living Arrangements

International students consider various factors while selecting country to continue their education such as cultural affinity, religious affinity, quality of education, and scholarship opportunities. Findings of the survey reveal that the most important factor for students in Turkey is low level of living costs. Yet, at the same time students reported that the most challenging issue for them is financial difficulties. It could be inferred from this result that students who come from relatively low income countries perceive Turkey as an affordable alternative for studying abroad compared to traditional receiving countries, but they still suffer from lack of financial resources. Financial problems mainly stem from insufficient financial resources, limited opportunities for scholarships and lack of part-time jobs. An important finding of the survey is that there was no international student receiving financial support from private associations and NGOs in their home country or in Turkey. Indeed, financial matters are usually out of the reach of universities and necessitate more complex policies at governmental level. Yet, universities should develop cooperation with the NGOs and private sector to increase scholarships and job opportunities for international students in their region.

Accommodation is also another important problem, as rents are very high and dormitories are insufficient. In this regard, scholarships from both state and private institutions should be increased for local and international students. Anatolian cities should become more attractive for international students due to the low living costs. Yet, opportunities for particularly part-time jobs should be enhanced in such cities and campuses. There should be cooperation mechanisms and planning among universities, local governments and NGOs to improve these cities as attraction centers for international students with their living standards and opportunities.

Academic Life

Quality of education is one of the main reasons for choosing Turkish universities. Almost 80% of international students reported that they are satisfied with the quality of education and their expectations were met. However, findings reveal that they have difficulties in integrating to academic life. Most of the students stated that they could not understand the lectures properly, participate in academic discussions and taking part in student groups. The most important reason lying behind this situation is language barrier for both incoming students and local students. International students abstain from participating in the lectures due to difficulty in expressing themselves in Turkish and fear of being misunderstood.



On the other side, local students do not want to spend effort for communicating with foreign students.

Thus, interaction among students remains limited in the classroom and in the campus. It is noteworthy that this situation was reported by also students from Turkic Republics. This might be resulted from the fact that Turkish language used in lectures as an academic language is different from daily usage of Turkish. Thus, although students could be familiar with Turkish used in daily life, this does not mean that they understand and use Turkish in academic manner. This is one of the most important reasons for academic failure and has to be taken seriously. Indeed, findings revealed that students assessed Turkish courses as inadequate. Thus, for contributing to academic success of incoming students, Turkish language training has to be improved and designed in line with the academic needs of international students.

Another reason for academic failure is insufficient interaction between the lecturers and international students. Almost 65% of students reported that they did not have one-by-one academic advice. This is also a problem for local students due to the high student/lecturer ratios and lack of time. Yet, academic advice is crucial for international students who are already unfamiliar with the system. Again, 42% of students found counseling services in the university as insufficient. This is also a very important point since international students struggle with many psychological factors and difficulties stemming from living in a foreign environment. Thus, university administrations should consider developing special mechanisms for both academic advising and psychological counseling.

Social Relations and Inclusion

Second important rationale behind choices of international students is cultural and religious affinity with Turkey. Yet, although international students feel closer to Turkish culture, they also report that their involvement in daily life of the city is limited. This might be resulted from language barrier that students perceive as one of the most important problems. Again, local people might have negative attitude towards foreigners due to lack of information and closed social structure. Universities could play an active role and lead the society for creating a multicultural environment in those small towns, in which both residents and international students will benefit. Presence of more international students could pave the way for mutual recognition and understanding among different cultures which will be an important gain for these cities in the long run. Just as Turkish students transform relations in these cities, international students could further create a richer cul-

tural environment. Another factor that international students regarded is their friends and relatives staying in Turkey. This factor is valid for particularly coming from Turkic Republics. They perceive their friends both as a reference for getting reliable information and as a support mechanism while living in a foreign country. Yet, these ties could also create inward looking communities that live within their borders and limited interaction with wider society.

Involvement of international students in campus life is also a problematic issue. The mere presence of many international students on campuses does not equal internationalization; international students must be integrated with domestic students both inside and outside of the classroom through meaningful collaborations and events (de Wit, 2011). Approximately 50% of students partially agree and 33% agree that they feel lonely and excluded in the campus. Moreover, 82% of students reported that they usually meet with other international students. This implies that there are groupings among students and only limited interaction between local and international students.

Yet, 84% of international students stated that they would be pleased if special programs with local students are organized. There are other studies supporting this finding, as well. For example, studies carried out by Bartram (2007) in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands found that international students expected significant social support from university staff, including help with the development of social networks through formalized peer systems and social events and trips. Such findings are very important in that international students want to communicate with local students if the barriers are diminished. University administrations, academicians and international officers should work on creating such facilities for bringing students together. Meeting in a more relax environment out of classroom could have positive impact on interaction among students.

On the other hand, 61% of students stated that they could not express their needs to administrative bodies. This means an important deficit for participation and involvement of international students in the university. International student representation could be improved through a student representative mechanism and regular meetings. There should also be different channels for finding out opinions, needs and suggestions of international students. Regular surveys that will be held by international offices could be a means for getting feedback from international students and improving international student services.

In this paper an example of a feedback from international students was presented and recommendations were put forward



accordingly. In order to provide international students with a more qualified experience on studying abroad, such studies should be increased and taken into consideration by policy makers. Turkey has the potential for becoming a regional higher education center that emphasizes cultural dimension more than economic gains and international students will be the key actors in establishing such an environment.

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