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QUALITATIVE STUDIES

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PROBLEMS OF CONFRONTING COLLEGE TURKISH STUDENTS IN AN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

All over the world, there have been remarkable increases in the number of international students because of educational opportunities and globalization. These students move from their home countries to other countries where they discover the world again. After moving, adapting to a new lifestyle and a different culture is not easy. This process might be isolating, stressful, and unpleasant. This article, therefore, illustrates the use of qualitative research to enhance understanding of international students' cultural experiences and facilitate the development of culturally specific interventions. Specifically, this study seeks to identify the problems encountered by Turkish students in an American university. The results of this study give the opportunity to reflect their thoughts and can help the administrations and prospective international students to understand and solve the problems encountered by them.

Keywords: Cultural Experience, Education, Homesickness, International Universities, Turkish Students

TÜRK ÜNİVERSİTE ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN BİR AMERİKAN ÜNİVERSİTESİNDE KARŞILAŞTIKLARI PROBLEMLER

ÖZET

Dünyanın her yerinde sunulan eğitim fırsatları ve küreselleşme sebebi ile uluslararası öğrenci sayısında çok büyük bir artış yaşanmaktadır. Bu öğrenciler kendi ülkelerinden dünyayı yeniden keşfedecekleri başka ülkelere gitmek durumunda kalmaktadırlar. Gittikleri ülkelerde alışkın olmadıkları yeni yaşam stillerine ve farklı kültürlere uyum sağlamaları kolay olmamaktadır. Bu uyum sürecinde hiçte hoş olmayan duygular, stres ve toplumdan soyutlanma gibi biçimlerde cereyan edebilir. Bu yüzden, bu çalışma nitel araştırma yöntemini izleyerek uluslararası öğrenim gören öğrencilerin gittikleri ülkelerdeki kültürel deneyimlerini anlamayı amaçlamıştır. Özellikle, bu çalışma üniversite öğrenimi gören Türk öğrencilerinin bir Amerikan üniversitesinde karşılaştıkları problemleri tanımlamayı amaçlamıştır. Bu çalışmanın sonucu olarak, uluslararası Türk öğrencileri düşüncelerini yansıtmış ve dolayısı ile üniversite danışmanlarına ve uluslararası öğrenci adaylarına karşılaştıkları problemleri anlama ve çözme fırsatı sunmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kültürel Deneyim, Eğitim, Sıla Hastalığı, Uluslararası Üniversiteler, Türk Öğrenciler,



1. INTRODUCTION (GİRİŞ)

Since humans first organized their societies, trade across boundaries has been an integral part of life. Trade among countries has caused the transmission of new knowledge and technology and application of what has learned in the travels to the survival and continued progress of human kind.

A new concept was created during the first decade of twenty first century: Globalization. Globalization has become a common idea in national and international dialogue in recent years. Mostly, the effects of globalization have long been dealt with in terms of economic and technological consequences, but what about the influence on education.

With increased opportunities for interaction and learning, education around the world is rapidly becoming transformed. Students studying in their home country seek to find the education opportunities other countries can offer them. All over the world, there have been dramatic increases in the numbers of international students. Because of increasing their numbers, several problems have developed for both universities and international students. More universities are diversifying and new departments and organizations are created to suit the needs of international students. However, adapting to a new lifestyle and a different culture is not easy. Students who study away from home encounter difficulties in their new environment. Adjusting to a new environment is an ongoing process. This process is isolating, stressful, and affects many areas of students' life. International students have trouble in all aspects. It is very hard to avoid the effects of moving from one culture to another.

The food is different; the clothing is different; even the mannerisms are different in a new place, and most are simply not that flexible. Preparing for such changes intellectually, psychologically, and physically can help international students adjust to change more quickly.

Furnham and Tresize [1] have suggested that problems facing international students are threefold: problems of living in a foreign culture (racial discrimination, language problems, accommodation difficulties, separation reactions, dietary restrictions, financial stress, loneliness, etc); problems of late-adolescents/young adults asserting their emotional and intellectual independence; and the academic problems associated with higher educational study.

Furnham [2] explains the culture shock is one of the biggest problems confronting foreign students. According to Furnham, culture shock is "the experience of visiting or living in a new culture is an unpleasant surprise or shock, partly because it is unexpected, and partly because it may lead to a negative evaluation of one's own and/or the other culture."(p.14).

Another big problem is homesickness. The key features of homesickness are a perceived need to go home, a sense of grief for the home (people, place, and things) and a concurrent feeling of unhappiness, disease and disorientation in the new place. Other problem confronting foreign students is about social support. Cobb [3] states that social support provides a person with three sorts of information; namely that they are cared for and loved; esteemed and valued; and that they belong to a network of communication and mutual obligation. Moreover, financial problems are one of the big issue confronting foreign students. Financial difficulties are undoubtedly the most common and persistent problems that international students face during their study. In addition, many international students may



have difficulties with language or difficulties with accents. They may have trouble in understanding and speaking English.

My interest in this study lies that I was an international student from Turkey at an one of the most popular American University. I remember I had had trouble since I came to United States like financial problems, communication with Americans, and lack of relevant academic/cultural background. Therefore, I was wondering other Turkish students had similar problems or not. What were they doing to solve their problems?

The American university that Turkish students enrolled has become well known throughout the world as a place where international scholars can study and achieve their educational goals. According to University's International Students Office, there were 3833 international students in Fall-2003 school semester. Ninety-five of them were Turkish students (the top fifth country after following India, China, Korea, and Mexico).

2. RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE (ÇALIŞMANIN ÖNEMİ)

Particularly, this study seeks to identify the different problems encountered by Turkish students of an American University and to analyze the problems confronting Turkish students at this university. It will give the opportunity to reflect their thoughts and can help the administration to understand and to solve international students' main problems.

3. METHOD (YÖNTEM)

3.1. Collecting Data (Veri Toplama)

Participant observation and interviewing were the two primary means of data collection. The interview data tapped Turkish students' thoughts about their problems in the university. They were transcribed, coded, and analyzed. They were conducted within a university city, located in east central Texas and they were all Turkish students at the same University. I am going to name this university city as KC. Data collected during 2006-2007 spring and fall semesters. Participants included 12 volunteer Turkish students in an American University.

Before making interview, I asked my Turkish friends to introduce me to other Turkish students who study at the university. I was worried about how to find Turkish students for my interview. I contacted one of my Turkish friends and I asked him to introduce other Turkish students to me for interviewing. He said that I already knew several Turkish students who were my friends and he could also tell his friends to make interviews with me. Therefore, I thought that everything would be okay but I needed time.

I asked semi-structured questions. Firstly, I started to ask structured questions. However, whenever it was necessary, I asked unstructured questions. Mostly, the interviewee's answer forced me ask another question. I tried to ask questions related to my research area. Some of my structured interviewing questions were as follows:

(a) What are the differences between the place (e.g. city, town) you lived in Turkey and KC? (b) How do you feel about these differences? Are you comfortable with them? (c) Did you have any difficulties in getting used to the American culture? (d) Have you ever had difficulties with American education system? (e) Do you have difficulties at the university or other American universities related to making friends? And (f) What are the things that you miss about your country?



3.2. Background of Interviewees (Görüşmecilerin Özgeçmişleri)

I interviewed twelve Turkish students at one of the most popular American universities of the country. Among twelve interviewees, only two persons, Erdal and Burcu, had previous experience living in the United States. Except Zeynep, Erdal and Burcu, other interviewees have been in US at most 3 years. Zeynep has been in US for 6 years. Burcu was a baby when her family came to US and she was grown up in Texas. She and her family went back to Turkey when she was 8 years old. Burcu came back to US 5 years ago for educational purposes. Erdal came before to US for his master program and he had to go back to Turkey. After 4 years, he and his family came to KC in 2002.

Eight of the twelve interviewees are currently doctoral students. The other interviewees are doing their master degree at the university. Nesli, Gokhan, Tugba, Erdal, Sansel, Tufan, Zeynel, Zeynep, and Abdurrahman are married and most of them have one or more than one kid. All interviewees lived in big cities, Ankara and Istanbul, before they came to US. The population of Istanbul is over 14 million and the population of Ankara is over 3 million. The occupations of the interviewees were five graduate and undergraduate students, one lawyer, one nuclear engineer, one veterinarian, and four teachers.

3.3. Interviews (Görüşmeler)

I was so worried about my first interview. I had already contacted with my friend when I saw her on campus one day. I asked to her if it was possible making interview about the problems of Turkish students in USA. She was very interested and she even told me the results of this research could be publicized in a journal. We decided to meet at a Mall at KC at 10:00 a.m. because my first interviewee would make shopping so she had time in the morning. Moreover, I contacted with another Turkish student who was introduced by one of my friends. He also accepted to make interview. We also decided to meet at the Mall because his home was very close to it. I asked him if we could meet at 11:00 a.m. in the morning. He accepted it.

That morning was a little chilly. I had already run in the morning so I felt all morning energy was inside of me. I always feel happy and energetic if I run in the mornings. It may be psychological. At that morning, running in the morning brought me my self-confidence again. It was good because I was worried about my first interview.

There were several people at the Mall at 9:55 a.m. Most of people were workers. I entered the Mall through a metal backdoor. It was very heavy. I thought these doors were made for American people because most Americans were big people. Generally, customers did not use this door but I knew that Food Court was very close to it, so I decided to enter by using it. As soon as I entered the Mall, I saw a lady drinking water from water fountain. She was old but she had walking shoes on her feet. It was very clear she was doing her walking exercise. I already had information some people just came to make exercise in the Mall because the Mall had perfect air condition, which did not make people hot or cold. The Food Court was quite empty at that time. I just sat down on the chair and I started to wait for my friend. A worker was cleaning on the tables. She was an African-American. She wore a red-blue T-shirt and pants. While she was cleaning tables, she also tried to talk loudly with another person. There were several other people. Some of them were in the line at food centers. I even saw a kid with his mom and I thought he must be the same age as my oldest daughter and he should be in a school at that time. May be something important happened and he could not be able to go to school but why the Mall?



My friend, Nesli, came at 10:01 a.m. She was on time. I appreciated to her to meet me. I informed her about interview and then we started to make interview. However, I had not decided to make interview by English or Turkish. She helped me about it and we decided to make interview by using English because I would not need to make translation.

"The where we lived is definitely different from KC"

- Gokhan, International Graduate Student

All twelve interviewees came from either Istanbul or Ankara. Both cities, especially Istanbul, are very big cities. Although Ankara is the capital city of Turkey, Istanbul is the biggest city in Turkey. First, I asked what the differences between the place they lived in Turkey and KC. Nesli and her husband have been in KC for 2 ½ years. The place she used to live in Turkey was Ankara, "Ankara is larger than KC and has several universities and all government entities so it is very large compared to KC and also have lots of cultural incidents, events like theaters, museums, and exhibits." She added, "Both cities have both advantages and disadvantages. In Ankara which is capital city of Turkey. It is better spend time on the weekends to there such as coffee shops, theaters, concert both classical and others but you do not have a chance to do some sports such as golf, or travel like the one you do in KC. In KC, it only takes five minutes to travel from one place to another. In addition, you can do sports here easily and some places organize sports, so these are the differences." I asked how she was feeling about these differences. She was not feeling comfortable with the lack of cultural activities in KC. "I missed going to concerts like classical music concerts, go to the theaters periodically like I did in Ankara. However, I like small towns because there is no traffic jam; you can reach wherever you want only within 5 minutes. This is peaceful, I guess, compared with a big city of course." Nesli added.

Murat has been in US for 15 months and he came from Istanbul. "Istanbul is the biggest metropolis of Turkey. If you compare to KC, it is really different because of 15 millions people so everywhere is very crowded." And he added, "I think the major difference is that you can use transportation system wherever you want to go in Istanbul but here in KC you are alone and you have to have a car. Mostly you have to spend your life in the car or in the building." I asked him how he was solving his transportation problem. He sometimes walked to school, sometimes rode a school bus and sometimes he asked his friends to drive him.

On October 23th, I met with Gokhan at his house. I had already contact with his wife, Ozlem, to make interview with her husband. She talked with Gokhan and we decided to meet at their home. My family and I went there at 8:00 p.m. We knocked in the door and Ozlem opened the door with smiling face. Then, Gokhan smiled us and we shook our hands. There was a sofa, an armchair, several chairs, a table, a television with cable, and another small table that several pictures were put in order. The pictures were covered by glass so you could see them. I thought that all Turkish students' house looks like each other. Although I told them it did not necessary to prepare foods for us, they already cooked some pastries, cakes, and kisir that was made by thin bulgur. We, all Turkish people, always want to make our visitors comfortable and show our hospitability. Ozlem and Gokhan did show the same hospitability. Their foods were delicious. Gokhan and I went the backyard to make interview in a quiet place because my kids could make noise and I could not catch main points in the interview. Gokhan is a student in the university and he has been here for 2 years. He has



married for one year. He and his wife are expecting a baby next year. Gokhan said "The where we lived is definitely different from here. The system is completely different such as, transportation. In Turkey, we have enough transportation vehicles and people are friendlier but here they look like afraid of each other. On the positive side, the people in here are more respectful than people in Turkey." I asked him what he was thinking about these differences and if he was comfortable about that. He replied, "Yes or no. I am comfortable at least traffic. It is very regular. Everybody obey the rules. Even if you don't know how to drive, you can easily learn driving here just in a few weeks without any difficulties. On the other hand, I am not comfortable with lots of things like being an international student is really tough here. Either getting a job or living with residents is not easy. Most of time, they do not let you go and do something with them." Tugba, who is another interviewee, is married and her husband is a student too at the university. She has been in US for 2 ½ years and she felt that major differences were about population and transportation. "First difference is about transportation. There is not enough public transportation, only university transportation. It is a kind of okay because I am student and I usually go to university by using university buses. However, you should have a car otherwise; you cannot go wherever you want. Although KC is a small town, it looks like Ankara in terms of traffic jam because everyone has a car in KC." She talked about the other issue; shopping. "Here, in KC, there are several big stores such as Wal-Mart, HEB so you spend lots of your time with shopping even if you want to buy one thing. However, in Turkey, mostly there are small markets, so you can shop in a short time." she said. Koray and Tufan also came from Istanbul. Although Koray found KC was a very quiet place, he also said that KC was a boring place. Tufan has been in US for 2 years and he feel that KC is a student town, "I am from Istanbul in Turkey and it is a big city. It is so close to the business world. However, KC is different. It is a student town. Without this university, there is no KC. There are 13 million people in Istanbul so maybe I can compare my city with Houston, but not here." On the other side, Tufan found American people were very polite in traffic because he said that most of Americans were educated. However, he was not so sure that he felt okay or not about differences between two cities. He gave examples about his feelings. "For example, one day, traffic lights were not working, but all people were obeying the rule and they were letting the other drivers go so everything was fine. However, in university, all kind of things are different; you cannot get of the system, you should be in the system and you should obey the system. I can give one example; people are getting up early and sleeping early. For a graduate student, I am not a regular people. My sleeping time is depended on my class schedule. Here, in USA, marketing system is also good. If you return something, which you already bought, it can be accepted without any difficulty but in my country, this is so difficult. I think countries' economical conditions play importance roles." Erdal, Sansel, Zeynel, Zeynep and Abdurrahman also came from Ankara and they agree that KC is a very small town and there is a transportation problem in this town if it is compared with Ankara. Burcu and Zeynep are not comfortable about the differences. Burcu said that, "I wish I lived in a bigger city. I wish I went to school that had a bigger population. Although KC is cheaper, it becomes such a boring place because there are not many activities to do. There is only one movie theater and one mall in KC. One of each. There is no variety. I do not see much diversion in KC." Zeynep is not also comfortable about the differences between KC and Ankara. Although she told me she could



focus on her study, because KC was a quiet town, she had trouble with the transportation system in KC. However, they like the level of life in US. Erdal told me "I like here because people have a lot of problems such as education, traffic, pollution, and other big city problems in Turkey," and "I wish Turkey does not have these problems and looks like here."

"We are so much exposed to the International media"

- Nesli, International Graduate Student

Another semi-structured question was about American culture. I wonder if they were faced with any cultural problems in United States because I was always told or read about cultural shock. I think, I did not live any cultural shock, what about other Turkish students. Were they faced with cultural shock? Nesli told me "In Turkey, our culture is a kind of mixture of Mediterranean, Middle East, and European culture. We are so much exposed to International media so it is kind of close to American culture." She had and still has difficulty in getting used to the individuality of people. I asked what she meant by telling "individuality of people". "People are kind of distanced from each other so first six month I had difficulties in getting used to this side of American culture" she replied and she thought that people in Turkey were kind of close to each other, especially neighbors and friends. For example, lots of time, they were together having coffee, tea, or other things. She continued to talk about individuality. To her, Americans do not want to get close to international people so she has had difficulty in getting in touching with American people compared with Turkish people. Although Gokhan, Tugba, Sansel, and Tufan had several cultural problems in US, they all think that these kinds of problems are small problems and they are used to them. Gokhan even did not know how to call somebody when he came to US first time, "just looking at phone and phone is looking at you." However, he thought that these kinds of problems were small problems. He told me "Life is easier here. When you work hard, life is easy. If you want to do something, you will get what you want." Sansel had difficulty to express himself to Americans. "Americans are generally very formal people. They care about the rules and structure too much, but Turkish culture is more flexible than American culture." Tufan explained why he had a problem in American culture: "How can I behave to teachers, class mates, and as a graduate assistant? To learn them takes time." Tugba said that American people were very organized unlike Turkish people, such as Americans wanted to plan every minute and they did not spend their time for nothing. Koray, Erdal, Zeynel, Zeynep, Abdurrahman, and Burcu told me they did not have any cultural difficulty. All of them had the same opinion. They thought that American movies and American pub culture influenced Turkish people so they knew already American culture very well.

"They are saying something; they know that I am not going to understand because of their accent. They start laughing, and then I am turning back"

- Gokhan, International Graduate Student

Except Nesli and Zeynel, all ten interviewees had language problems; especially the very first months when they came to US. Nesli did not have language problems since she had been educated 6 years in her country. However, because of cultural differences she had some because she explained that perceptions of people were different about communication channels that they put between themselves. Her accent is still not like Americans but she does not have a serious problem with her accent. She thinks that people's accent in Texas is quite



different and sometimes to understand them is difficult. She gave one example about that: "The first month when I came here I took a course. I had a teacher who was a Texan and he was around 60-65 so his accent was very strong. I really have difficulties to understand him. Sometimes I have difficulties to understand African-Americans." Murat also had some language and communication problems. He did not have any chance to speak English like most of Turkish students. He had problems in daily speech because he did not know common phrases and the things said in the basic situations. His classes were mostly focused on participation of students so the students at least had to participate 2 or 3 times in the class's everyday so he had to force himself to move out of his conversation comfort zone. Usually, he was missing the jokes, especially to understand the jokes was very hard because he had to have some references to deep cultural roots which he did not have of course. "For example" he said "like the movie that was shown 10 years ago, or some cartoons, or some products, which I am not aware of, so I was missing the jokes. Another example is that we have meetings in the MBA program at team bases. You cannot say a thing that might be understood as an offensive thing." I asked him what else he had experienced because I wanted him to talk more. He thought for a while and suddenly smiled. "I have an example about gestures which we have but Americans do not." "For example, a gesture in Turkey means something different in here. I have a funny example about that in Turkey, if you say no, you raise your eyebrow and your head but here you have to turn your face to left and right. When I raise my head to say "no", people do not understand me. They kept me asking questions." he said. Gokhan thought that he had language problems but not his point of view but from several Americans' point of view, these were many language problems. He says that may be because of their accent, Turkish students do not understand what they are talking about. Now, he does not have language problems with white people in US but he has still some problems with the pronunciation of African-Americans. I think he is lucky! because he cannot see many African-American in this university. I do not know why, but this is a reality. For example, some of African-Americans prefer to study at Health & Kinesiology, which is my department, I do not see any of them in my department. Gokhan gave me an example about the accent differences between North and South. "One year ago, I went to north for a conference. The people on the north speak very clearly. It is not difficult to understand them and you can easily communicate with them without having any problem, but here I had many difficulties at that time because of accent. Especially, in Texas, it is very tough to understand. For example, Texans are saying something; they know that I am not going to understand because of their accent. They start laughing, then I am turning back" he said. Tugba had difficulty to understand people so she could not communicate easily with them and even today, she has still problem to understand them. Why does she have still language problems although she has been in US 2 ½ years? She thinks it happens because of thinking in Turkish and then translating in English. She told me speaking fluently would take so many years. Tufan had some problems with his advisor because of misunderstanding or misconception. "My advisor told me that I could send e-mail for everything. Therefore, I understood that I could send e-mail for each problem I had and I did not need to come to see him at his office. I sent e-mails for two months about all my problems. After two months, he came to my office and told me why we were not meeting in his office. I realized that it does not necessary to come to his office for every small problem but it is necessary to come to his office for real problems and other important things and e-mail was the



easiest way to solve an easy problem. You know, we are learning” said Tufan. Burcu thought she knew English before and when she came here, she had many problems in terms of real life English. She was paying too much emphasis on accuracy more than fluency. She was intimidated by native speakers. She would not speak. She did not understand the pragmatic real life language. “First time I came in the US, I was at the airport, I thought “restroom” was a place where people get rest. Later on, I realized restroom is actually, what they called, public bathroom” she said. Abdurrahman and Zeynep had language problems at their classes during first time they came the University. Both of them were not feeling very comfortable speaking in front of the class. Even Abdurrahman could not find any words to say in the class. All other students, Koray, Sansel, and Erdal, had language difficulties during their first education careers at the University.

“Graduate school in USA is similar with Turkey”

- Tufan, International graduate student

Nesli likes the American education system and it encourages her to study at all time. “It should be consistently working and studying should be stable. Other than it is good system; rewarding, penalties, so I liked it.” However, Murat had some problems. He does not think they are really problems such as focus on the participation in the class, which is unlike in Turkey. He said, “In Turkey, it is based on lecture. Professor speaks and students listen. If you have a question, you can ask at the end of class. However, here, they make you speak all the time and professors are mostly facilitators. I think it is better than Turkish system and it is a good difference.” He also thinks that teachers are also more generous in grading at the university. Gokhan thinks that if the department that you are attending has good teachers, then the education system is not so different from Turkey. Sometimes it is harder than Turkey. I asked him what did “harder” mean. “Harder means better. In Turkey, teachers know the subject very well, but it does not mean they are good teachers because teaching is ability. Here, a few people really know how to teach. They also know the subject very well, but there are some teachers who do not know how to teach and they do not have any idea about the subject, too.” Koray, Tugba, and Sansel think that teachers at the university give many assignments and they do not give much time to students to prepare their homework. “Giving importance of plagiarism is different so you have to be aware of that when you are writing your assignments in USA” Tugba said from a different perspective. Abdurrahman, Erdal, Zeynel, Tufan and Burcu have not had any difficulties. I asked Burcu why she did not face with any educational problems at the university. “Because American scholars founded the university I graduated from Turkey so the university education language is English, GPA system is 4.0, and the students have the chance to select their electives. I can say that both education systems are almost the same” she answered. Tufan also did not face with any trouble about American education system, but he thinks that to obey the rules is not good all the time. “Because people are flexible, so if they have a problem, they should communicate and solve their problem as human beings. If you are keeping system very strictly, your system will be lost sometimes. Therefore, you sometimes need to get out of the system” he added. Erdal thinks that American education system at graduate level is excellent. However, his kids are going to elementary school and their program is not enough in theoretical perspective. For example, his kids are going elementary school and they have just started to learn multiplication tables. “However,” he said, “in Turkey, kids are learning it in primary school.” However, Zeynel told me “Here, the



level of education is lower than I expect even at graduate level. My master's level in Turkey is higher than my Ph.D. level in USA." Zeynep had and still has problem in asking questions to teachers and she always asks her American friends to edit her writing.

"There is a glass window in between American students and International students"

- Burcu, International graduate student

I asked how Turkish students' relationships with American students and it led me to ask another question; their relationships with other international students. "I have very few American friends because making friend with Turkish people is much easier for me because native language barriers or cultural differences are less with Turkish person. Especially, Americans who are from the region of Texas, it is hard to make friends with them. I think they are more conservative to international people" Nesli said. What was she thinking about her relationship with international students? She said that her relationships with international students were better than her relationships with American students in Texas. Murat has still problems with American students. "Perspectives on life, on work, on everything, we are very different. That causes some obstacles to meet people. As a foreigner, you cannot be as close as native people can to their groups" said Murat and he added "I think, at least we share some commonalities with other international students for being foreigners, may be same cultural or financial problems. I think we feel closer to each other." When Tugba was in Indiana, she did not have any difficult in making friends. However, she does not have many friends in KC like Indiana. She thinks that main reason of that can be the difference in social communication and conservative society in Texas. "I only have a few international students from China, India, and Korea. I do not have any problems with them. I think we share common problems with them," Tugba said. Gokhan said that it was not easy making friends who were not from Turkey. He told me If they were from other country other than US, it was okay, you could easily have friends. "He has to show himself to me as he is; I have to show myself to him as I am and this is tough in this society" and he added, "I can get along with anybody. I have many foreign friends. Here, my best friends are from India. They are sometimes more friendlier than Turkish people. There is a kind of strange fight among Turkish people. I cannot imagine it." Tufan has learned a lot of thing from his Turkish friends, not from residents or American students. "Here, most people have not good interpersonal relationships and they do not trust each other. One of our holidays, I wanted to visit our neighbors, I knocked their doors and I told them "I am you neighbor and living at that apartment. Today is our holiday and here is a gift for you." One of them accepted it. I think, neighborhood system in America is lost. This is completely different from my country. In my country, if you have trouble or in difficulty, you can go to your neighbors and they do everything for you" and he added, "In graduate school, you cannot have close friendships. Just say "hello" or "hi" but this is so common for all graduate schools. One of my classmates asked me to help her and I spent my two hours for her. The last time, I did not have a book but she had a book so I told her "could you show me how you found this result?" She did not show me anything. Can you believe that? All relations are business in Graduate School." I totally agreed with him. I think the same thing is also valid for Turkish students in Turkey. During my undergraduate study, some of my classmates did not give their notes to others because they were thinking that education was a competition among all people.



Anyway, I want to turn interviewing with Tufan. This time, I asked Tufan about his relationship with international students. He told me in graduate school, both Americans and international students were behaving similar. "They do not trust each other. If you are doing a project, may be you can have good relationships. Otherwise, you cannot have good relationships with students from all countries." Burcu, Abdurrahman, and Sansel also said that they did not have close American friends. Burcu always find herself closer to international students. She has a lot of Korean friends after Turkish friends. "International students share common difficulties. I think Americans do not allow any international person to be friends with them. They can be good classmates but they do not allow other international students to become very close friends. I mean I have a lot of co-workers but there is a glass window in between us that we cannot break." I asked her what could be the reasons. She said that it might be because of cultural differences or might be they did not trust international students or might be they did not have same religion or background with international students. Both Abdurrahman and Sansel have also more international friends than American friends because both think all international students share similar difficulties in USA. However, Zeynel thinks the opposite. "I have difficulties with international students, especially Koreans and Chinese. They have different cultures and different life styles. They do not have any social activities because they came here after they passed from hard life conditions and they are very bad in communication." Zeynep do not also have any problem making friends with Americans and international students. She said that although all international students shared common problems like transportation or financial, it did not enough reason to make international students closer than American students. She usually calls her American friends, not international students in order to solve her problem. Erdal and Koray have no any problems in making friends both Americans and international students.

"American foods are greasy and they have lots of additives"

- Nesli, international graduate student

Nesli has difficulties about food. "In our culture our food is much based on vegetables, beef, and chicken. We do not eat pork and we use olive oil. Mediterranean and Aegean Region diet is so different from here. American foods are greasy and they have lots of additives and artificial ingredients," she said. She has gained almost 12 pounds since she came here because of them. In addition, she cannot find some foods, which she used to cook in Turkey. She thinks that vegetables are very expensive in US compared with Turkey. After asking about foods, I asked what she was thinking about climate and weather. She found the whether was very hot in Texas, but she started to like the weather in fact. She likes summer being longer compared to winter and she likes shiny weather which here always happening; only she misses snow. Murat has also some difficulties about food. He does not like fast foods because he thinks they are unhealthy and expensive. He does not eat pork because he is Muslim, so he needs to ask if there is any pork products in ingredients before eating food. He told me people are very sensitive in Texas so most of times he can find food that do not have pork meats. He also prefers snow rather than hot weather. "The weather also changes from morning to evening. I really do not like that. In the summer, I have a problem with all air conditions all powers on in the buildings, so I am cold," Murat said. He does not have any difficulties with clothes because people wear almost the same things in his country. Gokhan has eaten pork here without knowing. "People said that this food was not pork, it was chicken. What I have



learned later was that it was pork. Right now, without eating pork, I can eat anything else." He mentioned another point of view. A few months ago, he had been in Japan. When he had seen the Japanese foods, he missed the foods in US. He could not eat properly for ten days because Japanese people were eating raw meat and raw fish. He thinks the weather in Texas is a big problem. He likes a kind of weather that should be somewhere between cold and hot. "It is impossible to anticipate what kind of weather will be tomorrow even after 10 minutes," said Gokhan. Did he have any difficulty about dressing? "Yes" he said. He was planning to buy jeans, but he could not find a suitable size for him. He went to a jean shop and hundreds of jeans were over there. He could not find one that was suitable for him. The length of the jean was suit for him but the problem was about the width of jean. It was so wide. "Two Gokhan can easily wear that jean." On the other hand, he thinks that he can go wherever he wants just wearing a T-shirt and shirt. Most of time when ordering in a restaurant, Koray has to say he does not eat pork. This is the only problem that he faced with. He does not have any problems with clothes either. Sansel, Tufan, and Erdal have no difficulty except pork and pork products because their wives are cooking Turkish foods at home. Tufan said, "I always eat at my home and I do not go any other place." Zeynep and Tugba are cooking Turkish foods and so they do not have any problem about foods. Zeynel and Abdurrahman also do not eat pork and its products and they even do not eat beef "because" Zeynel said, "I cannot eat meat because we, Muslims, believe that meat should be cut in a proper way" and he added, "We are not used to have fast foods but here, everything is fast foods. Totally different food culture." Normally, animals are butchered by a mechanical or an electric shock. Muslims, however, eat "halal" meat. To be qualified as "halal", the meat must come from an animal that is not "haram" -or forbidden- for example, pig. It must also come from an animal butcher by a Muslim, faced towards Mecca. The butcher must also offer the prayer "Bismillahirrahmanirrahim, Allahu Akbar" (In the name of Allah, Allah is great).

Burcu thinks American foods are very greasy and even water contain hormones. Therefore, she has gained a lot of weight and she is having trouble losing weight. She never actually makes something from fresh food besides salads. She loves fruits in Turkey; here she does not like the taste of fruits like orange, apple or banana. She talked about the buffet culture, which is different perspective. "I think, only America has Buffet culture. There are millions of wasted foods and people eat a lot unhealthy foods," Burcu said. She had difficulty with clothes but not in US. When she went to Turkey last summer, she felt she dressed very old fashion "Clothes are almost the same but I think, people in Turkey are more fashionable because people in Turkey follow European fashion and here people always wear casual clothes, just jeans and running shoes or tennis shoes." What about weather? "Texas weather makes me very tired and exhausted from time to time" and she compared the differences between Texas weather and Ankara/Turkey weather. "Weather is too hot and humid in Texas. I used to live in Michigan before. The weather was very cold in Michigan. From one extreme, I came to another one. The weather in Ankara/Turkey is hot but not humid. It is a dry hot weather." Zeynep thinks American and Turkish people almost wear the same style of clothes so she does not have problem. However, she did not like American clothes because she said that Turkish clothes were inexpensive and higher quality than American clothes. "The weather is too hot and humid for me. I hate weather in KC from May to September. I prefer to stay in Turkey at that time but it is impossible," Zeynep said. Abdurrahman, Zeynel,



Tugba, and Sansel have no any difficulty in finding clothes and they wear the same types of clothes in USA as they used to wear in Turkey.

I have faced financial difficulties since I and my family came to USA like paying health insurance of my wife and my three kids or emergency room expenses. Most of international students do not have permission to work off-campus like me. This causes problem because we, as international students, cannot find job. I asked other Turkish students whether they have experienced financial difficulties or not since they came to US. Nesli and her husband are both students. They are not allowed to work off campus because of their visa type so they have financial problems. "If something happens out of budget like going to the emergency room, it really shakes out. We have to depend on credit cards for those kinds of expenses," Nesli said. How do they provide their finance? She told me her husband is a research assistant (RA) in the university and his teacher is paying his tuition. She and her husband had some scholarships from time to time and these scholarships made them deal with their problems easier. Murat has always financial problem. He really had a hard time. He thinks everybody (international students) have the same situation. He got a graduate assistant (GA) position but his department pays less compared with other departments. When Gokhan came to KC, he had some financial problems because he did not have any opportunity to make enough research on what he is going to pay in US. Then, he did something good and his professor was convinced by what he did. His professor started to pay all his tuitions and insurance. Right now, he does not have any financial problems. Koray had also financial problems in his graduate study. His family helped him. They paid his tuition but he still has to work to pay bills. He is not experiencing any financial problems right now. Tugba, Zeynep, and Sansel are sponsorship students and they do not have any kids. When they came to United States, they had to buy so many things such as furniture. At that time, they had financial problem but now they do not have any more.

Erdal is married and he has two kids who are going to Elementary school. He thinks that all international students have financial difficulties during his/her first months when they come here. He had difficulties and he still has. He claimed, "International students do not work off-campus because of their visa status. They are lucky if they can find an assistantship position. Generally, the salary of international graduate assistants is less than the salary of American graduate assistants. For example, while an American GA is earning \$20.000, an international GA takes only \$12.000 in a year for the same job." Before coming here, Tufan's friends told him how much money he needed. Then he came here and he was so surprised that he paid more money than he expected. He did not have any money to survive. He added, "Then Allah helped me and I got two assistantships but I still have financial problems." Zeynep, Abdurrahman, and Burcu have also still financial problems. "This is the biggest problem I have had so far. Tuitions are expensive here and if you are married and have a child like me, it is almost impossible to pay tuitions and fees," Zeynel said. When Burcu came to the university, she was quite unhappy because her department promised that they would fund her. However, they did not keep their promise. When Burcu asked the reason of that they answered that she was taking only two classes and she had to take three classes. She replied that she had to take two classes because she could not afford three classes. She added, "Now you are telling me there is an assistantship available but I am enrolled to 2 classes!" She was angry. She could not pay her tuition and her mom helped her for 1 year. Right now, she does not have financial problem because department of residence life funds her, still not by her department.



She said, "I found my own assistantship from another department and I was so upset about that. This university has never supported graduate students."

I was curious about if they live another state, do they have the similar problems? This question also was not planned before so it was an unstructured question. Nesli answered me, "I believe difficulties I have here would be less if I live another state such as Michigan or California because Texas is more conservative place, and I feel it. It makes for international students much more problems because of this conservative but compared to other states Texas is cheaper than other states." Gokhan thinks that problems will be less than Texas, especially, financial point of view. "If I go somewhere else on the north of US, I will not be obligated to pay the tuition. Everybody say that the north is more expensive than the south. That is not correct. I have seen the north, too. Everything is the same between the north and south. Human relationships are going to be better, because people will not let you feel as an international student." Burcu believes that she will be more sociable and she will have more friends. However, she thinks, financial problems depend on the university. "Sometimes I regret my decision of coming to this university," added Burcu. Erdal, Zeynep, and Murat also defend the same opinion with Burcu. All these three Turkish students believe that if they live another state, their problem will be less than their problems in Texas. However, Koray, Zeynel, and Tufan has no any idea about that because as Zeynel said, "I can't answer that question because I did not live another state and Texas is only state where I spend my time so far."

"I miss food, crowded city, my friends, and my family. In terms of environment, I miss people because they are friendly, lovely compared to here and of course big city environment I miss a lot," Nesli said. All other interviewees also miss their families, friend, and foods. Zeynel missed loyalty, harmony, honesty, friendship and weather, not like hot and humid. Sansel has a different point; "I had good financial income and social status in Turkey so I miss the benefits of good income." I asked them if they could call themselves "homesick" or not. Not all interviewees except Burcu feel homesick. "I miss my family, people, delicious and healthy Turkish foods. I miss closeness of friends. I miss social activities like concerts, art galleries. I miss beach during summer. What I did not miss is traffic jam. I can say I am homesick but I try not to think of it."⁵

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION (SONUÇLAR VE TARTIŞMA)

The purposes of this case study were to identify the different problems encountered by Turkish students of an American University and to analyze the problems confronting Turkish students at this university. This case study would give the opportunity to reflect their thoughts and could help the administration to understand and to solve international students' main problems.

Participants were 12 Turkish students (4 female and 8 male students) who studied at the university. All interviewees were graduate students (8 doctoral students and 4 master students) at the same university.

All Turkish interviewees were from either Ankara or Istanbul. Both cities are big cities in Turkey. Ankara is the capital city and at least 3 million people live there. Istanbul is the biggest city in Turkey and at least 14 million people live there.

Although Turkish students mentioned the advantages of KC like a small town and opportunities to do sports, they did not feel fully



comfortable about the difference between the city they lived in Turkey and KC. Except three Turkish students, nine of them think public transportation system is completely different although they all comfortable at regular traffic. They said there was not enough transportation vehicles in KC. "In KC, you cannot imagine how hard is to go somewhere without a car," Murat said. Another big difference between cities is that cultural activities like theaters, museums, and exhibits. "I missed to go concerts like classical music concerts, go to the theaters periodically like I did in Ankara," Nesli said.

Culture shock is the physical and emotional discomfort suffered when a person moves to live in another country or place that is different other place of origin. Sadness, loneliness, preoccupation with health; aches and pains, mood changes; depression and anger, unwilling to interact with others, loss of identity, lack of confidence are the symptoms of culture shock. In this case study, no twelve interviewees had any cultural shock. "We are usually brought up with American pub culture. We watch many American movies, listen lots of music that is influenced by American pub culture," Burcu said. However, several of them encountered with small cultural problems like using facial expressions or behaving to teachers and classmates.

Turkish students found that to communicate with others in university was difficult at first. This was due to difficulties with language, difficulties with accents, or even difficulties with American culture. "I thought I knew English before and when I came here, I had a lot of problems in terms of real life English," Burcu said. They do not have big problems in communication any more. However, some of them still problems in expressing themselves. "I think speaking fluently will take so many years," Tugba said.

Although most of Turkish students did not have any difficulties in getting used to the American education system, some of them had problems like participation in the class discussions or doing assignments. The interesting thing was that while one Turkish student said that both American and Turkish education system at graduate level were almost the same, another Turkish student said that both education systems were very different. I think these two opinions are both correct because these two students graduated from different universities in Turkey. While Burcu said, "American scholars founded the university I graduated from Turkey so the university education language is still English, GPA system is still 4.0, and the students have the chance to select their electives. I can say that both education systems are almost the same," Tugba said, "American and Turkish Education system are very different. In Turkey, professors give a lot of homework and they give much time. However, here, professors do not give much time to students to prepare their homework. In addition, giving the importance of plagiarism is different so you have to be aware of that when you are writing your assignments in US."

Another issue was about social activities and making friends with especially Americans. For social activities, they do not have enough time to go out or do sports because "I need to work very hard," Murat said. Although four of Turkish students said that they did not have any difficulty in making friends with Americans, eight of them thought that Americans did not want to be close to international students. "I think, Americans are more conservative to international people," Nesli said. She continued to talk about individuality. To her, Americans do not want to get close to international people so she has had difficulty in getting in touching with American people compared with Turkish people.



What did Turkish students think about the relationships with other international students? While two of Turkish students had difficulties to understand them, ten of Turkish students felt closer to them than to American students. "I think, at least we share some commonalities with other international students for being foreigners, may be same cultural or financial problems," Murat said.

For Turkish students, there are two aspects of American foods: one is that the foods are greasy and unhealthy like fast foods, another is that Turkish students are Muslims so they do not eat pork and pork products. Therefore, they have difficulty to find foods without pork and pork products. They solve this problem asking ingredients of foods when they have to eat in a restaurant or buying foods and most of Turkish students prefer to eat at home with cooking Turkish foods and they can buy some Turkish foods in Houston.

For clothes, all twelve interviewees said that people in both countries dressed in almost the same style so they did not have any difficulties. However, all interviewees complained about the climate during summer time because of hot and humid weather. This kind of weather caused them to stay in the buildings.

Financial difficulties were undoubtedly the most common and persistent problems that Turkish students faced during their stay in the United States. "This is the biggest problem I have had so far. Tuitions are expensive here and if you are married and have a child like me, it is almost impossible to pay tuitions and fees. I still have financial problems and I am sure I will have it till I graduated from the school," Zeynel said. Although most of interviewees had scholarships or assistantships, they faced financial problems at some time or another and they sought alternative ways to continue their studies. However, because of their visa status, they were not allowed to work out of campus.

Eight of interviewees believed that if they lived another state, especially in the North of America, they would have fewer problems like financial, social relationships or making friends with Americans. The other Turkish students did not think that there would be any difference among states or they had no any idea because Texas was the only state they knew.

Homesickness is a perceived need to go home, a concurrent feeling of unhappiness, disease and disorientation in the new place. Although Turkish students missed firstly their family, friendship, honesty, Turkish foods and other special things, except one of twelve interviewees, other interviewees did not identify themselves as a homesick. The very fact that they miss all these things is itself a sign of homesickness. For Turkish people, the family structure is the most important issue among the other subjects. If they are together with their parents, kids, and husband/wife, the place they live is not one of the biggest problems. I think, the reason they did not recognize themselves as a homesick is that nine of twelve interviewees were married and they lived together with their wives/husbands and kids in KC.

Based on the foregoing results of the study, the following conclusion can be made: The major problems of Turkish students identified in this case study are first, financial difficulties; second, communication/language barriers; third, making friends with Americans; fourth, transportation; fifth, cultural adaptation and last one is foods and weather. Among these problems, financial difficulty is the main problem which Turkish students are confronted with.

In view of the research findings, the following recommendations are forwarded: International students should be aware of what they are getting into and prepare for the adjustments that they will be



encountering. In reality, there is difficulty in adjusting to these problems and some cannot be prevented. However, still the fact that one knows what may happen helps one develop flexibility and adapt to the new environment. International students should also be ready for the financial, emotional, and academic problems they will encounter. They should exert effort in learning and do not hesitate to ask questions.

International students should be aware of the important details and plans of their stay such as home stay, registration, course references. Moreover, they should have a contact with International Students Service well in advance of their arrival.

International students should try to be flexible. They should be open to trying new things, new activities, new foods, and make friends. Through this, students can be better acquainted and have a better chance to cope with their new environment.

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