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University-Based Social Work Intervention with International Students: Using a Multicultural Approach

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Abstract

The number of young students who immigrated to other countries for educational purposes is increasing day by day and this situation is likely to continue in the near future. The students who have immigrated for the purpose of education experience various problems in adapting to the culture of a new country. This may have negative effects on their educational success, valuing leisure time, participating in social activities within the new society and socialization in general. In this article, adjustment problems experienced by undergraduate international students and the application of social work to solve these problems will be discussed. Besides, it will develop suggestions that contribute to encourage young students to search for solutions to the problems they face in a multicultural environment. The aim of this article is to explain how university-based social work intervention can be used for international students in order to solve their problems and enhance their well-being. The solutions that the study proposed will be structured within the framework of multicultural approach.

Keywords: International Students, Adjustment Problems, Multicultural Approach, Social Work Practice, Migration for the Purposes of Education.

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Çok Kültürlü Yaklaşımı Kullanılarak Uluslararası Öğrenciler ile Üniversite Tabanlı Sosyal Hizmet Müdahalesi

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Öz

Eğitim amacıyla diğer ülkelere göç eden genç öğrencilerin sayısı her geçen gün artmakta olup bu durum yakın gelecekte de devam edecektir. Eğitim amacıyla göç eden bu öğrenciler, yeni ülkenin kültürüne uyum sağlama gibi çeşitli sorunlar yaşayabilmektedir. Bu durum, öğrencilerin akademik başarısı, serbest zaman değerlendirilmesi, yeni toplumda sosyal faaliyetlere katılma ve genel olarak toplumsallaşma üzerinde olumsuz etkilere neden olabilmektedir. Bu makalede, lisans öğrencilerinin yaşadıkları uyum sorunları ve bu sorunları çözmek için sosyal hizmet uygulamaları tartışılacaktır. Aynı zamanda, genç öğrencileri çok kültürlü bir ortamda karşılaştıkları sorunlara çözüm aramak için teşvik etmeye katkıda bulunabilecek öneriler geliştirilecektir. Bu makalenin amacı, çok kültürlü yaklaşımı kullanan üniversite tabanlı sosyal hizmet müdahalesinin uluslararası öğrencilerin sorunlarını çözmek ve refah düzeylerini arttırmak için nasıl kullanılabileceğini açıklamaktır. Önerilen çözümler, çok kültürlü yaklaşım çerçevesinde yapılandırılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Uluslararası Öğrenciler, Uyum Sorunları, Çok Kültürlü Yaklaşım, Sosyal Hizmet Uygulamaları, Eğitim Amaçlı Göç.

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Introduction

International Students and Their Problems: A General View

In recent years, strong interest is observed in the movement of international students and there exists a competition among countries to attract them because student movements contribute to the state's economy and reinforce cultural diversity. Young people receive benefits from immigration to other countries with the aim of education; however, they are facing problems and negative experiences which may affect their psychological, social and academic status. Cultural and linguistic problems are considered as the most important problems faced by international students in the first year in the host country. Stress generated by living in a new environment with a lack of social support affects the adjustment process of students and their being in harmony and harmony with the new society and this results in attendance problems.

Although the cultural and linguistic problems are the most important problems facing students in the first stage, social studies and researches suggested that they are not the only problems facing the international students in the host country or in the new society. The problems experienced by students differ from one student to another, and vary depending on the social and cultural environment which they came from. This can be observed through several studies conducted in many countries about the problems of international students.

In a study conducted by Snoubar (2015) which aims to determine the social service needs, educational and academic requirements, problems in cultural, linguistic, psychological, economic, and personal development of international students in addition to the problems in their free time activities and housing, problems that they face during their higher education in Turkey. This demonstrate the type of problem experienced by students is often associated with cultural and social aspect as well as political and economic conditions of the country of origin.

Several studies about international students show that students coming from some specific regions are open to face different problems than the others. For example, the international students from the Middle East and receiving higher education in America: experience the problems of racial discrimination and are accused with terrorism on the basis of their religion and national origin (Sutton, 2002 Hanassab, 2006, pp. 157-172; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007, pp. 263-280).

Considering the current situation of the world, it can be observed found that there are many regions experiencing wars and conflicts the international students are young people who have been affected directly or indirectly from these conditions. This situation creates other challenges for international students and affects the cultural adjustment and academic success of them requires a psychosocial intervention.

For example, Assaf's study (2005) on university students in Palestine found that the students who live in an environment of war and conflict face some mental health problems; they are always nervous and disappointed and have concerns about damages that can affect their families. Confusion and tension experienced by these students have clearly led to academic failure. The study revealed that the traumatic events experienced by young people in an environment of war and conflict cause the spiritual, physiological and long-term mental health problems as well as adverse effects in their future adaptation.

The economic situation and social and cultural background of students lead to housing problems and problems in valuing their leisure time. Many international students mainly depend on their families or on scholarships for their living. In one of the studies about the international student grantees in Turkey found that students spend their money on basic needs such as food, clothing and housing (Akdağ, 2014). The results of the study about university students showed that financial issues are highly influential in the ways that students value their leisure time (Terzioğlu and Yazıcı, 2003, pp. 1-31). The results of the survey on 367 international students showed that vast majority of students value their leisure time by spending time with friends and family members as well as surfing the Internet. The activities such as sports events, recreation and holidays, and participation in artistic and cultural events remain on the second order due to the income limitations (Snoubar, 2015).

The problems experienced by international students may have a negative impact on the adjustment process and being in a harmony with the new culture or may urge adjustment process to take a longer time. In addition, distance from the family, weak social support network and language problems pose a major challenge for the international students and therefore it can directly affect the well-being of international students as well as their goal of academic and personal development in the host country. These problems require some specific solutions at the individual, group and institutional domains. These solutions depend on the policy of the host country as well as the quality of social services provided.

Research Methodology

This study was conducted by reviewing literature on the problems of international students. At the same time, using the framework of the multicultural approach and social work intervention.

The Importance of Social Services for International Students

Attracting and hosting international students require states to prepare appropriate policies and social services that contribute to the solution of their problems. Service quality and quantity affect the harmony of students and their adaption to new cultural environment by contributing to the solution of economic, social, linguistic and housing problems. Providing scholarships, job opportunities and health and social services help lots

of students in academic success. Here lies the importance of cooperation between state institutions, particularly the Ministry of Youth and Sports and Council of Higher Education through development programs that help welfare of international students and facilitate their adaptation into the new society. In addition, the availability of competent units within universities and student hosting help students to have access to these services and to get benefit.

In order to solve the problems of international students International Students Offices must be established in all universities. With the help of this office it can be possible to solve the problems of these students through the provision of advisory services, follow-up academic situation, organize recreational and cultural activities as well as periodic meetings (Özer, 2012, pp. 10-13). In addition to the educational, cultural and guidance services this office should provide social services units, as well. In these social service units, two social workers, two psychologists and guidance specialists should be employed. They should be able to speak foreign languages and work with an understanding of teamwork for the solution of different psycho-social and economic needs and the problems of international students. The location of this office, its telephone number, working hours and services should be announced to international students when they are enrolled in the university (Snoubar, 2015). The existence of such centers in university campus contributes significantly to the welfare of international students, strengthens them and specially provides support for the ones who face cultural adjustment problems. In addition, through these units social workers can consolidate and strengthen vulnerable students such as the disabled ones, those with different sexual orientations and the students coming from the environment of war and conflict.

Young people who have lived for a time in an environment of war and conflicts highly need psychological and social services, such as psychological and social support programs and rehabilitation programs in order to dispose from the negative effects of what that they have experienced or witnessed in the violence environment (Snoubar ve Hawal, 2015, pp. 129-136). Consequently, taking into account these vulnerable groups and, the development of treatment programs and guidelines rehabilitating and supporting them psychologically and socially has necessarily become urgent. It is hard to consider a host state which does not provide for international students with the necessary social services. These services enhance international students by contributing to the solution of their problems and therefore their academic success as well as to realize the idea of cultural exchange and the globalization of education and the educational institution.

Multicultural Approach and Social Work Practice with International Students

Cultural factor is one of the most important factors that international students focus on during the selection of country of higher education. However, the new culture remains as a mysterious and enigmatic issue for them. The host country must develop mechanisms

to enable them to get harmony and to adapt to the new environment; otherwise, adaptation process will become more complex and affect the other social aspects.

Adaptation is defined as the ability to convert the conflict between the individuals and society in which they live (Tomanbay, 1999). By participating in a new society and settle there, albeit for a certain period of time, this process can be stress-inducing for most of international students because these students change their society, respond to the difficulty in roles and expectations of their host countries, these students have come face to face with various problems especially in terms of culture. In the most general terms, these difficulties cause adaptation problems bringing out culture shock and accompanying stress and, the lack of language, psychological problems, being exposed to discrimination and economic difficulties. Some students search for ways to adapt to host country's culture, on the other hand, some of them are extremely loyal to their own culture and have tended to keep their culture more superior (Kuo, 1976, pp. 297-306; Doğan, 1988; Özçetin, 2013). If an appropriate professional intervention does not take place in these instances, this may lead to the emergence of a process of intense stress, anxiety and academic failure. Large cultural differences between the host country and country of origin along with the language problems may conclude in the racial segregation of students. In addition, housing problems increase stress and thus the severity of culture shock. For example, according to the findings of a study on international students in Australia, the large gap between the cultural background of the student and the culture of the host country as well as the fragility of social support network and the problems faced by students become the matters that lead to cultural stress and increase the cultural shock hence, they affect the academic success of international students (Thomson et al, 2006).

Adjusting to new cultural and social environment is the most important problems of international students. It can be described as one of the critical issues that could pose a crisis for the young students in the new country. Providing psycho-social support and counseling services for international students are very important issues because these services reduce cultural shock of young students. The fragility of social support network, or lack of it increase the importance of professional intervention with young people in the new social environment. Hence, the intervention of social work is important in the field of youth and multiculturalism, and they can play an important role in helping young people for cultural adaptation and to overcome their problems.

The profession and discipline of social work that arises on the basis of social justice and human rights carry out various activities to meet the needs of individuals. It also resolves their problems and provides them with their social needs. Social workers who are working with different groups of people (children, youth, women, families, the elder, the disabled, etc.) in different levels (micro, mezzo, and macro), according to the properties of target groups, benefit from different theories and approaches.

Multicultural approach can be considered as one of the most important approaches from which social work practice may benefit its work with international students (Özgür, 2009).

Multicultural approach, can be defined and shaped with the current notions of postmodernism, this current support understanding, accepting culture and cultural differences, representing and defensive.

Regarding multiculturalism four major components are discussed (McCarthy, 1991). These are:

- Multiculturalism evaluates culture as an important part of the human experience and as a required element.
- Multiculturalism comes from the idea of pluralism.
- It also emerges as a response to the monoculturalism; aims to implement the values of different cultures.
- The idea of dominance as power and oppression fall into the literature of multiculturalism (Özgür, 2009).

The importance of multiculturalism is not only to allow different cultures to continue their existence but also to accept that different cultures are valuable (Taylor, 1996). Social work practice in multicultural knowledge, skills and value dimensions can be mentioned in all social work interventions. Information dimensions in social work include basic information about the application of this information in the multicultural approach and this includes differences in knowledge; knowledge of history, culture and current reality of the information.

Second is the skills dimension which represents social worker's competencies and qualifications related to his/her work. International students will join the multiculturalist approach of social work practice structured pattern of relationships. Social service professionals should have the cultural awareness and cultural information on the study carried out refers to the ability to transfer. These skills are communication, problem solving, reconciliation, empowerment, advocacy and empathy.

Finally, the dimension of value is performed and the applicant will work in such a way that provides guidance on how to approach the group. At this point, social workers need to be aware of their own value judgments. Or unwittingly judgmental or unethical behavior or attitudes can also be shown. In fact all these dimensions are important when working with client groups, this will directly affect the application of expert supervision. Perhaps it may be appropriate to take a supplement.

The intervention of social work in the field of youth can be categorized into micro, mezzo and macro levels and aims to address international students' problems and their solutions at different levels, to achieve their welfare and therefore to elaborate their academic success. The work at the individual level with international students requires social worker skills, information and ethical values. Social workers identify social support network and the strengths and weaknesses of the international student by taking into account

their cultural background. Here, social worker should identify the systems that students deal with in the new cultural environment, identify the problem and encourage students to participate in the solutions.

The social workers who use multiculturalist approach in social work practice as well as individual issues should learn and appreciate the cultural values of international students, wholly understand it and also should have knowledge about their families and where they live. Regular meetings should be held for international students aimed at facilitating higher academic achievement through recognition of international students as well as ensuring their adaptation to various conditions of their accommodations where they live for the purpose of education. In the unity of social service social worker should organize open and closed groups of international students who face the same problems in a new cultural environment. Here is an opportunity for international students to discuss their problems and benefit from similar experiences of other students. In addition, they can learn the ways to overcome their problems through groups and these groups help them to develop mechanisms of coping, with their problems by addressing and resolving them. Here lies the importance of the group in the formation of social support network and providing psychological and social needs. As Dominelli (2002) argued that the group can become a source of change as well as a means of coping with change.

At the institutional level and social policies social worker should be involved in policy-making pertaining to international students or international youth. These students are considered to enrich the cultural diversity within the host country and thus their cultural problems should be addressed through policy which aims to integrate international students with the new culture, give them an opportunity through activities and projects to introduce their culture. Therein lies the role of the Ministry of Youth and Sports in collaboration with the Council of Higher Education in developing solutions to the problems faced by international students. This can emerge in the form of cooperation projects and programs for the description of other cultures and for reducing prejudices that can be exposed to young people in the host countries.

Surmounting these problems, social workers should not only adhere to policy formulation but also to improve diversity as well as availability of services to address international students. There should be various programs within the framework of concepts such as multiculturalism, diversity, equality and justice to raise the awareness about international students in the host community. Its not easy to live together especially when surrounded by diversity and originality of living in a judicious society. However, it is very important that we implement appropriate approaches and practices.

In the framework of the multicultural approach, social workers should

In the framework of the multicultural approach, social workers;

- Understand the culture, its impact on human behavior and its role within the society; and recognize that every culture has its own strengths.

- Have a knowledge addressing culture of target groups; be acceptable and sensitive to cultural differences; act in such a way that he/she consider the target's culture while offering services.
- Strive to understand the nature of social differences and oppression mechanisms based on the differences stemming from race, color, ethnicity, sex, age, marital status, political view, religion and beliefs, sexual orientation, mental or physical disabilities; and attend training programmes and maintain personal development on such issues (Özgür, 2009).

Social workers should also benefit from “culturagram” developed by Congress (1994, 2000, 2004; akt.: Özgür, 2009); they should find out the reasons laying behind the arrival of international students with educational purposes; their legal status, their social life, their language spoken at home and that in society, their health beliefs, their crisis experiences, their holidays and other special days, their relations with cultural and religious institutions, their values regarding education and working life, their family structure and their views on power, myths and rules; and they should develop appropriate practices accordingly.

Discussion

International students face many problems that could be attributed to many reasons. The cultural difference is one of the most important problems that face most international students in the similar ways. It is the first of the problems they face in the first stage in the host countries. But the failure to overcome the problem lead them to cultural stress and cultural shock, and this affects the well-being of student and may lead to psychological and social problems and therefore to academic failure. Here lies the importance of the existence of the unity of social services in all the universities to address the problems of international students and help them to overcome cultural problems and to be in harmony with the new culture and achieve academic success. Social work has an important role in this area through the intervention to resolve the problems faced by international students on many levels in collaboration with several institutions and ministries. In this intervention social work many use various approaches. One of the most important approach is “multiculturalism”. Making international students be in harmony with the host country's culture helps them to achieve academic success and motivates them to participate in social life in the new society. Therefore, host country should make appropriate policies, and provide these students with psychological and social services that contribute to facilitate the harmony of international students in the new cultural environment.

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