Türkiye'de yükseköğretim düzeyinde İngilizce öğrenen uluslararası öğrencilerin bağlılıklarının araştırılması

Exploring the relatedness of international English language learners at the tertiary level in Türkiye

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ÖZ

Bir yabancı dil öğrenmek güçlü bir motivasyon, kararlılık, başkalarıyla iş birliği yapma ve yabancı dil öğrenme kaygısıyla başa çıkma gibi bir dizi güçlüğü barındırdığından ve ayrıca, uluslararası öğrenciler bu zorlukların çoğunu ev sahibi ülkedeki ilk yıllarında deneyimlediklerinden, uluslararası öğrencilerin duyuşsal durumları öğrenme çıktıları üzerinde önemli rol oynamaktadır. Bu doğrultuda mevcut çalışma, ikinci dil öğrenenlerin temel psikolojik ihtiyaçlarından biri olarak kabul edilen bağlılık duygusunu yükseköğretim düzeyinde uluslararası İngilizce öğrencileri bağlamında inceleyen nitel bir araştırmadır. Çalışma Türk yükseköğretim bağlamında uluslararası İngilizce öğrencileri ile gerçekleştirilmiştir. Toplamda 12 katılımcı çalışmada yer almış ve yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler yoluyla toplanan veriler, ilgili kodlar ve temaları saptamak amacıyla tematik analiz yöntemi kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Elde edilen bulgular, öğretim elemanlarının ve diğer personelin uluslararası İngilizce öğrencilerine karşı olumlu ve ayrımcı olmayan tutumlarının katılımcıların bağlılık duygusuna önemli ölçüde katkıda bulunduğunu; zayıf arkadaşlık bağları, anavatan özlemi ve öğrenim ücretleri ile yaşam masrafları gibi bir takım faktörlerin ise bu hissi zayıflattığını göstermektedir. Bazı katılımcılar, sosyal etkinlikler, ders dışı faaliyetler ve konuşma kulüplerinin bağlılık algılarını arttırabileceğini ve dolayısıyla İngilizce öğrenme motivasyonlarına katkıda bulunabileceğini önermektedir. Çalışmadan yapılacak pedagojik çıkarımların Türkiye'de yükseköğretim düzeyinde İngilizce öğretimi alanındaki paydaşlar için yol gösterici olması beklenmektedir. Bu bağlamda, bağlılık duygularını artıran politikalar ve eylemlerin, yükseköğretim programlarında İngilizce öğrenen uluslararası öğrencilerin devamlılık ve başarılarını artırması beklenmektedir.

*Anahtar Sözcükler***:** İngilizce öğrenenler, yükseköğretim, uluslararası öğrenciler, psikolojik ihtiyaçlar, bağlılık

ABSTRACT

As learning a foreign language encompasses a number of challenges, such as requiring strong motivation, determination, collaboration with others, and coping with foreign language learning anxiety, and since international students experience many of the challenges during their first year in the host country, the affective states of the international students play a crucial role in their learning outcomes. Thus, this study is a qualitative investigation into the international English language learners' feelings of relatedness, which is accepted as one of the basic psychological needs of second language learners. The study was carried out with international EFL learners in the Turkish tertiary context. A total of 12 participants took part in the study, and the data collected through semi-structured interviews were analysed using thematic analysis in order to come up with relevant codes and themes. The findings suggest that positive and non-discriminative attitudes of the instructors and other staff seem to contribute considerably to the participants' sense of relatedness, while weak friendship ties, homesickness, and financial factors such as tuition fees and living expenses reduce it. Some participants recommended that social activities, extracurricular tasks, and speaking clubs could increase relatedness perceptions, and thus contribute to their motivation to learn English. The pedagogical implications are expected to pave the way for the stakeholders to gain more insight regarding the field of English Language Teaching at the higher education level in Türkiye. In this regard, policies and actions contributing to the feelings of relatedness are expected to increase their retention and achievement in the higher education programs.

*Keywords***:** English language learners, higher education, international students, psychological needs, relatedness

INTRODUCTION

The number of international university students has been on the rise for a number of reasons, such as personal aspirations, globalisation, internationalisation of higher education all around the world, financial reasons, wars, and conflicts in their homelands (Beine et al., 2014; Jin & Wang, 2018; Kritz, 2006). Those students are also called "internationally mobile students" by UNESCO (2022) and defined as "individuals crossing the borders with a clear purpose of receiving education in the destination country" Therefore, international students should not be confused with exchange students who stay and study in a foreign country for a shorter period and complete a small number of courses there. A recent report by UNESCO (2022) indicates that there are more than 6.5 million international students in the world, and the number is expected to increase in the following years since studying abroad has become a lot more affordable and accessible than before. According to Abbott and Silles (2016), students' perceptions of the educational quality and value of host universities in the country of destination play a fundamental role in their choice of study destination. While studying abroad bears a number of advantages for international students, such as offering them better educational opportunities, expanding their knowledge of the world, increasing employability, and learning a new language, it also provides the host countries and institutions with numerous benefits, such as constituting a source of income and enriching the global vision of the host country (OECD, 2023). Though it is not among the top 10 host countries in the world, Türkiye is also home to more than 250,000 international students from dozens of countries (CoHE, 2022).

Despite its popularity among tertiary-level youngsters all around the world, the phenomenon of being an international student is not a painless and hassle-free one. Jin and Wang (2018) highlight the challenges and problems encountered by international students by pointing to the high drop-out rates among international students especially during their first year in the host country. Culture shock, language barriers, racist attitudes, discrimination, homesickness, and financial difficulties have been named among the common problems experienced by international students (Karuppan & Barari, 2010; Sherry et al., 2010; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). These challenges are predominantly experienced during the first year of undergraduate studies, and if not handled carefully and overcame, students are likely to drop out or even develop serious clinical symptoms such as depression (Sümer et al., 2008). As most of the international students in Türkiye prefer to study in fully or partially English Medium Instruction departments, they spend their first year in an English preparatory program unless they succeed in the English proficiency tests, or they can beexempt from the program by submitting a valid document to the higher education institutions.

On the other hand, it is well known that the first year at university is an even more demanding and troublesome period due to its unique nature stemming from the shift from high school to higher education, the sudden change in the course contents and teacher profile, moving to an unfamiliar city or country, and falling apart from family and long-term friendships (Leow et al., 2023). A strong sense of relatedness during this challenging time plays a crucial role in enhancing learner motivation and learning effort among international students (Beachboard et al., 2011). Since they serve as the initial point of contact for many foreign students arriving in Turkey to study in English-medium instruction departments, the Schools of Foreign Languages and English preparatory programs gain significance from both academic and sociocultural perspectives. However, as Kaufman and Dodge (2009) state, few studies put the emphasis on the relatedness of higher education students, and to the researcher's knowledge, there have been no attempts to explore the sense of relatedness of first-year international students who study in the English preparatory programs in Turkey.

For all the aforementioned reasons, the present study aims to shed light on the international students' sense of relatedness in English preparatory year context, with a primary focus on the factors affecting their relatedness and the possible outcomes of relatedness. In line with the overall purposes of the present study, the following research questions are asked:

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1. What are the factors affecting the international EFL students' choices of the host country and university?
2. What are the factors satisfying the international EFL students' need for relatedness?
3. What are the factors frustrating the international EFL students' need for relatedness?
4. In what ways could the international EFL students' feelings of relatedness be (further) increased?

Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) has frequently been visited by scholars as a strong theoretical framework for motivation. As in many other fields, it has also been empirically supported in the field of education (Sheldon et al., 2017; Vansteenkiste et al., 2006; Weinstein & Ryan, 2010). According to SDT, human behaviours are shaped by the degree of perceived autonomy and self-determination. Sheldon et al. (2017) assert that self-determined action usually appears in line with one's own desires and will, expressing innate passions and values that one has personally accepted. However, non-self-determined or controlled behaviours are directed by some external locus of causality. Besides, it is assumed that the fulfilment of fundamental psychological needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy can have favourable effects on intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In a nutshell, in an educational context, competence refers to feeling suitably pushed to achieve mastery; relatedness represents feelings of connection, belonging, and acceptance; and autonomy relates to feelings of choice and control over behaviours and goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Perceived satisfaction of the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness reinforces self-determined motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2002), which in turn predicts the psychological well-being of internationally mobile students.

In the literature, there has been research pointing to the positive outcomes of self-determined motivation. To exemplify, Noels et al. (2000) found that self-determined second language learning motivation was negatively correlated with language learning anxiety while predicting the learners' tendency to keep up with their studies. Likewise, learners' academic performance also seemed to be affected positively by their self-determined academic motivation (Vansteenkiste et al., 2006). It was also found in the literature that international students with higher self-determined motivation experienced less culture shock, which substantially slows down cross-cultural adjustment (Yang et al., 2018).

Relatedness as a psychological need

Relatedness, according to SDT, is one of the three fundamental psychological needs for the psychological well-being of individuals. As a direct determinant of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000), relatedness is perceived as the most important component of SDT. Relatedness simply corresponds to the desire or tendency to feel connected to and accepted by others (Ryan & Deci, 2000), such as teachers (Gest et al., 2005). In a broader sense, learners' feelings of connectedness or belongingness indicate their sense of relatedness, which has been associated with higher intrinsic learning motivation, academic achievement, and emotional well-being (Deci et al., 1991; Furrer & Skinner, 2003). As an important construct to create intrinsic motivation among learners, satisfying the need for relatedness is of vital importance. According to Furrer and Skinner (2003), sincere interpersonal interactions with people like peers, parents, and teachers can satiate learners' need for relatedness. It is quite critical that teachers and faculty members demonstrate a genuine interest in their students, invest their time and attention in them, and value their opinions and efforts in a non-judgemental school climate (Furrer & Skinner, 2003).

In the context of English language teaching, Munoz and Ramirez (2015) conducted a study on language learning motivation-enhancing practices, and they found that relatedness is the primary factor influencing teachers' ability to foster motivation. Although competence and autonomy were also found to be beneficial, creating appropriate social contexts, such as strong

relationships between teachers and students, was the most prominent factor contributing to motivation.

With the purpose of exploring the needs of relatedness among university EFL students in Japan, Agawa (2020) conducted a qualitative study with 24 students. The results illustrated that EFL learners favoured connectedness with their peers as an important determiner of their motivation. Collaboration with peers in learning tasks was also found to contribute to feelings of relatedness, and it was reported to considerably motivate the learners to learn English as a foreign language. In another recent study with 600 Japanese tertiary EFL learners, Leeming and Harris (2022) revealed that extrinsic forms of motivation had little effect on performance, while intrinsic motivation significantly predicted the participants' academic performance. Hence, establishing a high sense of relatedness might contribute to EFL learners' performance as it is directly associated with internalised motivation. In the Turkish EFL context at the tertiary level, on the other hand, Aydoğan (2018) investigated the relationship between basic psychological needs proposed by SDT and some variables related to EFL. The findings of this correlational study indicated that autonomy, competence, and relatedness were all in significant and positive correlations with each other. Besides, the fulfilment of these psychological needs positively correlated with achievement in English language skills.

Internationally Mobile Students as Others

According to a recent UNESCO Higher Education Report (2022), there has been a dramatic increase in the number of internationally mobile university students all around the world. In just two decades after the year 2000, the number of international students seems to have tripled (UNESCO, 2022). However, as Jin and Wang (2018) postulate, there is a paucity of studies focusing on this unique and growing population. Berry (1997) developed a framework for acculturation and adjustment, focused on the adjustment process of international students, and explored their psychological well-being. Since then, there has been research delving into the adjustment problems experienced by international students (Berry, 2006). Among the acculturation stressors, discrimination has frequently been noted by the researchers. Lee and Rice (2007) state that international students from Asian, African, Latin American, and Middle Eastern countries studying in the US suffer from discriminatory behaviour such as verbal insults, physical harassment, and implied inferiority. It is also highlighted that discrimination against international students, either on or off campus, causes fear and dropouts among the internationally mobile students. Unless prevented through proactive measures, such discriminative behaviour can easily take more severe forms with serious consequences for all parties (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

The communication need of human beings is an innate one (Deci & Ryan, 2000), and naturally, the language barrier arises as one of the prominent factors affecting the international students' academic performance (Chen, 1999), as it can hinder students from understanding the course contents, writing assignments, and interacting with others in class (Mori, 2000; Nazir & Özçiçek, 2023). In non-English-speaking contexts where the medium of instruction is English, English language proficiency turns out to be as important as the command of the native language. A number of scholars (Andrade, 2006; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006; Yeh & Inose, 2003) report that a low command of English is directly attributed to low levels of academic achievement at the university level. Moreover, language proficiency is an important factor influencing the sense of belongingness among international students (Yan & Pei, 2018). In the sociocultural domain, foreign or second language anxiety emerges as a serious stressor that can lead to serious consequences in social interactions (Andrade, 2006; Chen, 1999). Yeh and Inose (2003) also claim that language barriers can even result in the alienation of international students.

To conclude, as a crucial construct of language learning process, learner well-being is a key objective of all the educational practices (Dewaele et al., 2019). Such well-being and learner motivation can be successfully supported by satisfying the basic psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Feng et al., 2023), and the need for relatedness in particular (Munoz & Ramirez,

2015). With their unique learner profiles, the relatedness of the international EFL learners needs to be addressed and explored thoroughly in order to eliminate the possible negative consequences of the dissatisfaction of this critical psychological need (Sümer et al., 2008). While numerous studies have explored the relatedness needs of EFL learners in general, there is a paucity of research specifically examining this need among international EFL learners during their initial year in the host country (Jin & Wang, 2018), a period that may lead to significant challenges for many (Berry, 2006; Yeh & Inose, 2003). The present study will, therefore, both fill a serious gap in the literature by providing insights into the relatedness of the international EFL learners in Türkiye, and come up with findings regarding the means to cope with the factors bringing about the dissatisfaction or frustration of this basic need.

METHOD

The study utilised a case study research design, as one of the qualitative designs, in order to gain a deeper insight into the sense of relatedness among international students enrolled in a tertiary-level English preparatory program in Türkiye during the 2023-2024 academic year. As an appropriate and robust way for comprehending a collection of events, thoughts, or behaviours within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the thematic analysis method was employed in the study.

Setting and Participants

As a qualitative case study, the current research was carried out at Manisa Celal Bayar University School of Foreign Languages. The school hosts more than 1000 students in its English preparatory program as a prerequisite for English-medium instruction departments every year. Following the criterion sampling method, 23 international EFL students registered to the English preparatory program were invited to take part in the study since the aim of the study was to explore the relatedness feelings of international EFL learners at a specific setting. However, four of them frankly rejected to be interviewed, and three others did not respond to the invitation, leaving 16 eligible participants. Yet, 4 more turned out to be Turkish citizens taking the Foreign Students University Entrance Exam using their dual citizenship, and they were also excluded from the study. In the end, a total of 12 international EFL students provided valid interview data for the research. In the context of the present study, "familiarity with Türkiye" was determined by the participants' previous exposure to Turkish culture, visits, and stays in the country. As another demographic variable, "the proficiency level of the international participants in Turkish language" was determined by their Turkish proficiency exam scores (issued by the Centre for Turkish Language Teaching), and their speaking proficiency during the interviews. A brief overview of the participant profile is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
General Profile of the Participants

ID	Gender	Nationality	Familiarity with TR	Proficiency in Turkish
P1	Male	Azerbaijan	Yes	Good
P2	Female	Iran	Yes	Excellent
P3	Male	Iraq	No	Poor
P4	Male	Syria	No	Poor
P5	Female	Azerbaijan	No	Excellent
P6	Female	Azerbaijan	No	Excellent
P7	Male	Syria	No	Moderate
P8	Male	Syria	No	Moderate
P9	Male	Iran	Yes	Good
P10	Female	Bulgaria	Yes	Good
P11	Female	Azerbaijan	Yes	Good
P12	Male	Syria	No	Moderate

Data Collection and Analysis

Upon receiving the ethical approval of the Ethics Committee, semi-structured interviews, in which the researcher can incorporate customised follow-up questions within the interviews while directing the conversation (Ravitch & Carl, 2019), were used as the data collection tools in the present research. The interview questions were prepared by the researcher in line with the purpose and the research questions of the study, and two other researchers with PhD degrees and experience with qualitative educational research were consulted to find out any revisions required and to ensure validity. They reviewed the questions for clarity, comprehensiveness, and alignment with the research questions, and their feedback led to revisions in wording and sequencing (Torrance, 2012). In line with Saldana's (2011) proposition, each participant was informed about the interview process and the confidentiality of personal data. Each interview session lasted 25-45 minutes and was audio-recorded by the interviewer.

In the analysis of the data, Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis with a deductive (theoretical) approach was adopted. Following the data collection, the audio-recorded interview data were transcribed word-for-word in order to familiarise with the data and identify the relevant information in the data. After this data immersion step, recurring keywords and codes were identified. Afterwards, the codes identified were collected under certain themes regarding the purposes of the study. Lastly, using the emerging codes and themes, a path model for the international EFL learners' sense of relatedness was developed (Naeem et al., 2023). Apart from the model visualisation, the data analysis and presentation were carried out using the qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA. In order to address reliability issues, 20 percent of the interview data were also coded by another experienced qualitative research expert working as a professor at a state university in Türkiye. The intercoder reliability was calculated using Cohen's Kappa, yielding coefficients of over .80, indicating a high level of agreement (Cohen et al., 2017). Discrepancies in coding were discussed and resolved through consensus. Besides, the preliminary findings of the qualitative data analysis were sent to three of the participants for member checking (or respondent validation), which is generally deemed to be an important action to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research (Torrance, 2012). The participants confirmed all the interpretations without any refinement suggestions.

Research Ethics

All the rules stated in the "Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive" were followed in the entire process from the planning, implementation, and data collection to the analysis of the data. None of the actions specified under the second section of the Directive, "Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Actions" have been carried out.

During the writing process of this study, scientific, ethical, and citation rules were followed; no falsification was made on the collected data and this study was not sent to any other academic media for evaluation.

Participants were informed about the study and signed an informed consent form.

Besides, in order to collect and record data from the participants, an official approval from the Directorate of the Manisa Celal Bayar University School of Foreign Languages was granted (dated as 18.12.2023, with an issue number: E-23558954-605.01-684891).

Research ethics committee approval information

Name of the ethics committee: Manisa Celal Bayar University Social Sciences and Humanities Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee

Date of the decision: 29.12.2023

Document issue number: E--050.01-695236

RESULTS

Reasons for Choosing the Host Country to Study

To begin with, the analysis of the data uncovered the underlying reasons of international students for choosing the host country and university to pursue their undergraduate degrees. The participants of the present study stated a number of reasons for their choices (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Reasons for Choosing the Host Country and University to Study
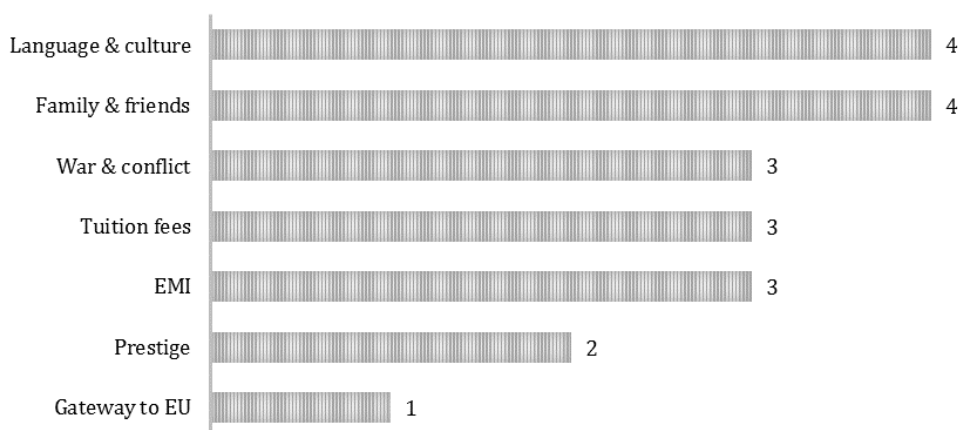
Most predominantly, the international EFL learners in this study chose to study in Türkiye since they had family members, relatives, or friends who had studied or were studying there (*f*=4). Another outstanding reason emerged to be familiarity with the Turkish language and culture (*f*=4). Especially the students from Azerbaijan, who also spoke a Turkic language, uttered this factor as a key reason. The fact that many departments at the university offer English medium instruction was another important rationale for the participants' choices (*f*=3). Likewise, affordable tuition fees (*f*=3) at the university also seemed to affect the international students' choices. Moreover, some participants expressed that their choice of the host country and city stemmed mostly from their desire to run away from the wars and conflicts in their homelands (*f*=3). Though few, some students also stated that Türkiye was a favourable and prestigious destination for them to receive a high-quality university education (*f*=2). Lastly, a student from Syria reported that he chose Türkiye as a gateway to any European Union (EU) country and was actually planning to move to an EU country after graduation. The following extracts reflect the views of the participants regarding their choice of host institution to study as international students.

> I sent my application to a few universities, and indeed, I was accepted to them. As I said, I had aunts here, I preferred this city. I have two aunts; I have to stay in one of them. They don't give dormitories to foreigners here, so I have to go to a private dormitory. (P6)

The primary motivation of P6 appears to be familial ties. The presence of aunts in the city was the deciding factor, overriding other considerations like on-campus accommodation. This extract emphasises the importance of social support networks in the decision-making process.

> The first thing that influenced my choice of Türkiye was that I chose Türkiye as the closest country to Azerbaijan, as the most similar country in terms of language, religion and culture, and I chose Türkiye because it looked so. And at some point, we saw it as an exit to Europe, which is very much experienced by Azerbaijani youth. (P5)

This participant's choice seems to be driven by geographical proximity, cultural and linguistic similarities with their home country (Azerbaijan), and the perception of Türkiye as a gateway to Europe. This reveals a more strategic approach to their choice, considering both cultural comfort and future opportunities. The "exit to Europe" idea is a significant finding, indicating a broader aspiration beyond simply studying in Türkiye.

> Sometimes I'm glad, because it could have been worse. Maybe this school, this city was the best for me. Allah (God) knows. I should go back even if I'm not satisfied, but I don't want to. Because people don't want to stay there (Syria). There is no war now, but the region is dangerous. There can always be a war there. I think one should think the worst and be satisfied. (P8)

This extract from the interview with P8 reveals a complex mix of emotions and motivations. The participant expresses a sense of resignation ("it could have been worse") combined with a pragmatic acceptance of their situation. The fear of returning to Syria due to ongoing instability is a powerful motivator. The phrase "think the worst and be satisfied" suggests a coping mechanism in the face of uncertainty.

> It was also important that the department was in English, because if you study in Turkish, you will have a chance in Türkiye, but if you study in English, you may have a chance all over the world. I am also happy to be at the School of Foreign Languages. I mean, everything can be better, nothing can be perfect, but in general, it is good. (P10)
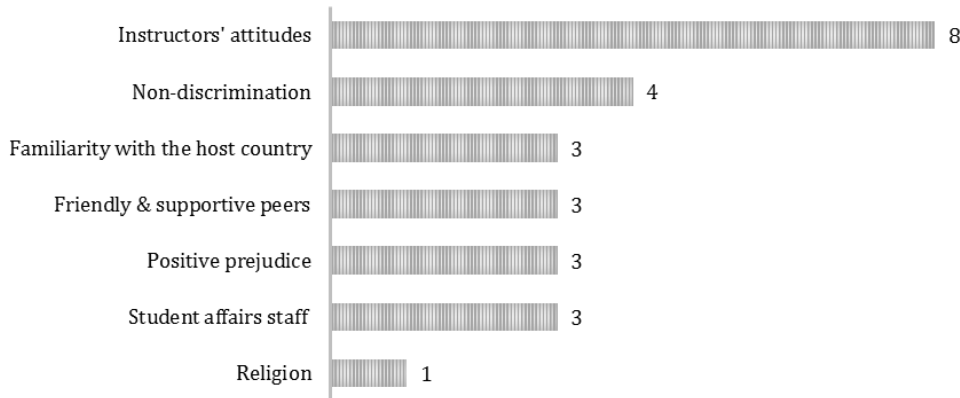
Lastly, Participant 10 seems to focus on the practical advantage of studying in English. The emphasis on global opportunities suggests a career-orientated approach. While acknowledging that "nothing can be perfect," they express overall satisfaction.

Factors Satisfying the Relatedness Need

As for the factors increasing the satisfaction of the relatedness need of the international students, the data yielded a number of significant findings (Figure 2).

Figure 2
Factors Satisfying the Relatedness Need of the International EFL Students

Factor	Value
Instructors' attitudes	8
Non-discrimination	4
Familiarity with the host country	3
Friendly & supportive peers	3
Positive prejudice	3
Student affairs staff	3
Religion	1

The most important factor under this theme turned out to be the attitudes of the instructors in the research setting. To be more precise, the participants reported that their EFL instructors were often friendly, helpful, and supportive during the classes (f=8). Likewise, the respondents expressed their satisfaction with the positive attitudes of the student affairs staff (f=3), and their classmates (f=3). As another important contributor to the level of relatedness, the absence of discrimination against the international students (f=4) was another remarkable finding of the data analysis. The participants expressed that they had experienced no instances of direct discrimination by their instructors or peers at school. On the contrary, they even reported a positive prejudice (f=3) against them as they are from another country (far from homeland) and "guests" during their stay in Türkiye. However, this finding was not evident in the data yielded from the participants from Syria and Iraq. Having prior experiences with the host country or city (f=3) was deemed to be another influential factor to satisfy the need for relatedness. In other words, those familiar with the region, culture, language, and lifestyle of the hosting country reflected stronger belongingness and relatedness when compared to those with no familiarity or previous visits to Türkiye. Though statistically rare, another important finding is that the religion of the hosting country (f=1) might be a key determinant of relatedness since religion as a common denominator can easily foster a strong bond between individuals. Sample extracts regarding the contributing factors to the satisfaction of the relatedness need of the international EFL learners are presented as follows:

> When my professors know that I am a foreigner, they explain everything more clearly. They try to make sure that I understand what they want to explain or say. I think they are more tolerant and understanding. (P7)

In this extract, Participant 7 seems to appreciate the extra attention and clarity provided by professors. This suggests that perceived understanding and support from instructors contribute positively to their feelings of relatedness.

> Because they don't treat me like a stranger or foreigner; I don't want it anyway. I mean, if they treat me like a stranger, if they treat me well because I'm a stranger, it's like I'm sick. It's like you feel worse then. (P3)

Participant 3 explicitly rejects being treated differently because they are a foreigner. They perceive such treatment as condescending and isolating ("like I'm sick"). This response clearly highlights the importance of genuine, equal treatment for fostering a sense of relatedness.

> Student affairs staff are very important for us. They were also very helpful in a lot of issues, for example, printing the student ID card, helping with tuition fees, informing us about Erasmus applications. They told me all of them one by one, so I was able to find answers to all my questions. (P1)

In these lines, Participant 1 focuses on practical support from student services. While helpful with logistical issues, this extract emphasises institutional support rather than deep interpersonal relatedness. However, it is seen that efficient and helpful administrative processes can reduce stress and create a more positive overall experience, indirectly contributing to well-being and a sense of being cared for.

> Because I continue to learn, this is due to the feeling of commitment. Otherwise I would have left, I couldn't be able to do it. For example, I am satisfied with my classmates. Sometimes if I say something wrong in class, they tell me the right thing. For example, (they say) do it better like this, do it better like that. They also give an example; "I study like this; you do the same to succeed". (P11)

These statements by P11 provide valuable insights regarding the peer effect on relatedness. Constructive feedback and sharing of study strategies from classmates appear to contribute to a sense of belonging and support within the learning community. This is a strong indicator of relatedness being fostered through collaborative learning and mutual support.

> I've already lived in Iran for 15 years and here (in Türkiye) for 9 years, almost half of my life. I was a child there for 15 years; I mean, I was a child until I was 5 years old. Apart from that, since I have lived here more, I feel that I belong here more. So, I feel at home here. (P2)

The extract from Participant 2 suggests that time and integration into the local community play a crucial role in developing relatedness. This extract also points to the importance of shared experiences and a sense of shared history in fostering belonging.

> I have a friend who lives in the same dormitory, he studies nursing at university, and he is Turkish. His attitude towards me is very nice. We live in a religious foundation dormitory. So religiously, so there is no difference between us, whether Syrian or Turkish, there is no difference between us. (P7)

Finally, the comments by Participant 7 provide insightful findings regarding the effect of the belief factor on relatedness perceptions. The shared religious background is explicitly mentioned as a key factor in creating a sense of connection and equality. This highlights the role of shared values and beliefs in fostering relatedness, particularly within a shared living environment.

Factors Frustrating the Relatedness Need

The present study also aims to uncover the factors frustrating the international EFL learners' needs for relatedness, and therefore, it has come up with a number of factors negatively affecting

their levels of relatedness (Figure 3). These factors mostly appeared to be either directly related to the interpersonal relationships, or indirectly to the consequences of these weak relationships.

Figure 3
Factors Frustrating the Relatedness Need Among International EFL Students
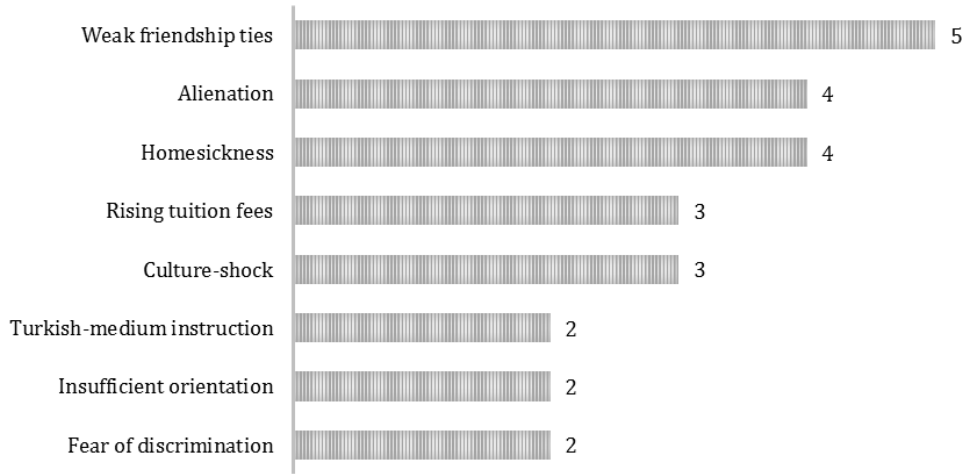
As mentioned before, although the participants reported no cases or experiences of discrimination or racist attitudes, they pointed at the weak or unsatisfactory friendship ties with their peers (f=5) as an important reason for relatedness frustration. This factor was accompanied by alienation (f=4) and homesickness (f=4), which could emerge as inevitable consequences of the lack of strong friendships between the internationally mobile and the Turkish students. Culture shock was especially stated by the participants with first-time experience of being in the host country or the city. As other key factors, the increasing tuition fees (f=3) and the culture shock experienced in the host country (f=3) were named among the frustrating factors. As another issue worth being considered is that the respondents were worried about experiencing any form of discrimination (f=2), even though they persistently claimed that they had never experienced any. The participants in the present research seemed to associate relatedness-frustrating factors like culture shock and loneliness with insufficient orientation offered to the internationally mobile students (f=2). Although there is a general orientation program in the institution addressing all the students, the participants also demanded a specifically designed one for the international students. Moreover, a respondent also suggested enriching the content of the existing orientation program with more integrative and inclusive contents regarding the inclusion of the international students and creating a harmony among all the students. Finally, it was found that some students had complaints about the use of Turkish by the instructors as the medium of instruction (f=2). Indeed, their frustration seems to have resulted from being forced to learn a foreign language (English) through another foreign language (Turkish). Below are some extracts from the interviews with the participants:

> When I came to Manisa, I had a lot of difficulty in making friends, you know, I couldn't get used to it, because I am a person who can get used to a place with friends and social environment, you know, for me, it is never the city, but at some point the social environment is more important. As the social environment is important to me, I tried to make friends when I came here, but I couldn't make friends. I don't know exactly why, somehow, maybe due to lack of communication or because I was a foreigner. And, I came here because the cultures were very similar, but I encountered a very different culture. (P5)

It is understood from this extract by Participant 5 that the perceived lack of communication and the feeling of being "othered" ("because I was a foreigner") are significant frustrations. The unexpected cultural differences, despite anticipating similarities, add to the sense of disorientation. This extract points to the importance of social integration for international students' well-being.

> I just came here to study. I will (study), and I will leave. Of course, I would like to have friends, I would like to meet them later, invite them to my home. But these are not essential. As long as I don't have any problems here, it's all fine. I wouldn't miss my home if I saw this place as my home. But I don't mean it in a bad way; the truth is obvious. (P3)

This participant (P3) expresses a purely instrumental approach to their studies ("I just came here to study, and I will leave"). While acknowledging a desire for friendships, they are not considered essential. The statement "I wouldn't miss my home if I saw this place as my home" reveals a lack of belonging and integration. This suggests a coping mechanism of emotional detachment to deal with the lack of social connection.

> Sometimes there is disrespect. There are people who call me a refugee because I am a foreigner, making fun of me. No one makes fun of me at school, but when I say I am Iranian or a foreigner outside, they can behave badly. They treat me like a fugitive. Actually, I did not flee my country, I was happy with my life. I came here for education, so did my brother. (P2)

For participant 2, being called a "refugee" and treated like a "fugitive" is deeply upsetting and reflects a lack of understanding of their situation. The extract highlights the negative impact of prejudice and stereotypes on international students' experiences.

> We, foreign students, pay tuition fees. The tuition fees have risen a lot depending on the economy (of the country). I also won the department I liked, but I could not enrol at that point. I settled here because the tuition is better (cheaper) here. I could not enter the places I wanted because it (tuition) was high. Some friends I know dropped out of school, so it's just because of the tuition fee. (P4)

In this extract by Participant 4, financial pressure as a pragmatic concern is a significant source of stress, impacting the students' academic choices and even causing some students to drop out. This extract points to the importance of financial stability and affordable education for international students' success.

> Now I must be able to talk to the students comfortably, but I can't. Sometimes I feel embarrassed. I sometimes avoid showing that I am a foreigner. I see on social media how they behave after learning you are a foreigner. Maybe, they will say "go to your country, what are you doing here etc. I just avoid it, not to make them say all these. (P12)

Participant 12 expresses a fear of negative reactions from local students upon discovering their foreign status. This fear leads to self-concealment and an inability to interact comfortably. This extract clearly highlights the psychological burden of feeling unwelcome and the impact on social interaction.

> It is a little difficult for me because I learn English in Turkish. Well, I did not learn Turkish grammatically. It is difficult to learn (Turkish) grammar because I learnt it by speaking. I had the same problem today. There was a grammar topic; it is difficult to learn English because I do not know Turkish well. (P2)

Lastly, Participant 2 focuses on the challenges of learning English through the medium of Turkish, which they have learned primarily through speaking rather than formal grammar. This creates a double layer of language difficulty, hindering their academic progress in learning English, the target language in the EFL setting. This extract highlights the importance of appropriate language support for international students.

Ways to Increase the Relatedness of International EFL Students

Within the scope of the present study, it was also aimed to come up with possible solutions or actions to take in order to increase the satisfaction of the relatedness need among the internationally mobile EFL learners (Figure 4).

Figure 4
Ways of Increasing the Sense of Relatedness Among International EFL Students
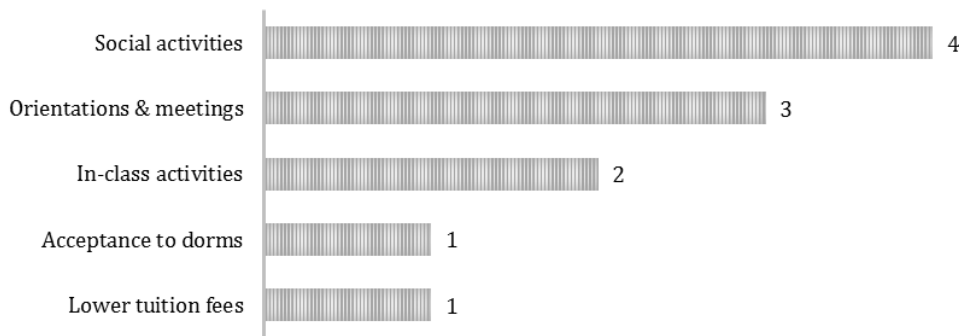
The most frequently articulated action to take was to organise and carry out social activities (f=4) such as picnics, fests, intercultural days, arts and sports events, and conversation clubs that are likely to increase the inclusion of international students. Besides, such activities are expected to create harmony among the students and eliminate prejudices against international students from certain countries. Holding orientation programs and focused meetings with the Turkish and international students (f=3) was expressed as another improvement by the respondents. Unlike social activities, these meetings are suggested to be more systematic, theme-focused, and led by the instructors or the school administrators. In the micro-level, the EFL instructors were expected to put more pair work or group discussions (f=2) into practice especially during the relevant topics such as multicultural contents and issues. Despite the fact that they are more related to national educational policies, the participants also mentioned decreasing the amount of tuition fees (f=1) and passing regulations allowing the acceptance of international students to public dormitories (f=1) as factors to increase the satisfaction of the relatedness needs. Below are the sample extracts from the semi-structured interviews:

> I think, certain activities can be organised at the School of Foreign Languages every week related to English. Competitions with prizes can be organised related to language and sports. In other words, I am sure that more of such activities would have a positive effect on the students' loyalty to the school. For example, a student has a very good relationship with his/her teacher, when that activity is carried out with that teacher, and when the teacher participates, the student wants to participate and feels more connected. (P1)

The participant (P1) suggests organising more activities at the School of Foreign Languages, including competitions with prizes related to language and sports. The emphasis is on activities that foster connection and engagement. The key point is the involvement of teachers in these activities, which is believed to strengthen student-teacher relationships and increase student participation and loyalty to the school.

> After all, I am a foreigner, I will always be a foreigner. They don't like Syrians very much in the world, I think it is the same in Türkiye. Okay, they are not enemies, but they don't like us either. Because it is normal. But maybe students can be given information at school. If they are told about the war and the situation, Turkish people will be different. They will think differently. We can tell them what we lost in the war. (P8)

The lines by Participant 8 include a valuable recommendation which is to provide information to Turkish students about the war and the situation in Syria. This participant believes that education and raising awareness can change perceptions and foster understanding. Sharing personal stories of loss could also humanize the experience and build empathy. This extract emphasizes the need for intercultural education and dialogue to address prejudices and promote inclusion.

> For example, if people get to know each other more in class. Of course, there is no sitting and chatting, but if there is activity, group dialogue in the classroom. For example, if people tell more about themselves, there was nothing like that, for example, if they say to me, "make a presentation, introduce your country, introduce your hometown, introduce your food". If he

says "introduce your clothes", for example, if I come to the presentation with my clothes there, I will be happy. Maybe my friends will like it more. For example, if they did the same, I would also learn more. (P3)

Finally, Participant 3 suggests incorporating activities that promote intercultural exchange 'within the classroom'. This participant believes that these activities would facilitate mutual learning and create a more welcoming and inclusive classroom environment. The extract highlights the importance of creating opportunities for students to learn from each other's cultures and build connections through shared experiences.

In conclusion, the findings of the present research revealed a clear picture of the factors contributing to the satisfaction of the basic psychological need of relatedness as well as the challenges which lead to the frustration of this crucial need. Figure 5 summarises the findings with the paths indicating the causal relationships among the factors identified in this study.

Figure 5
Path Model for the Satisfaction and Frustration of Relatedness
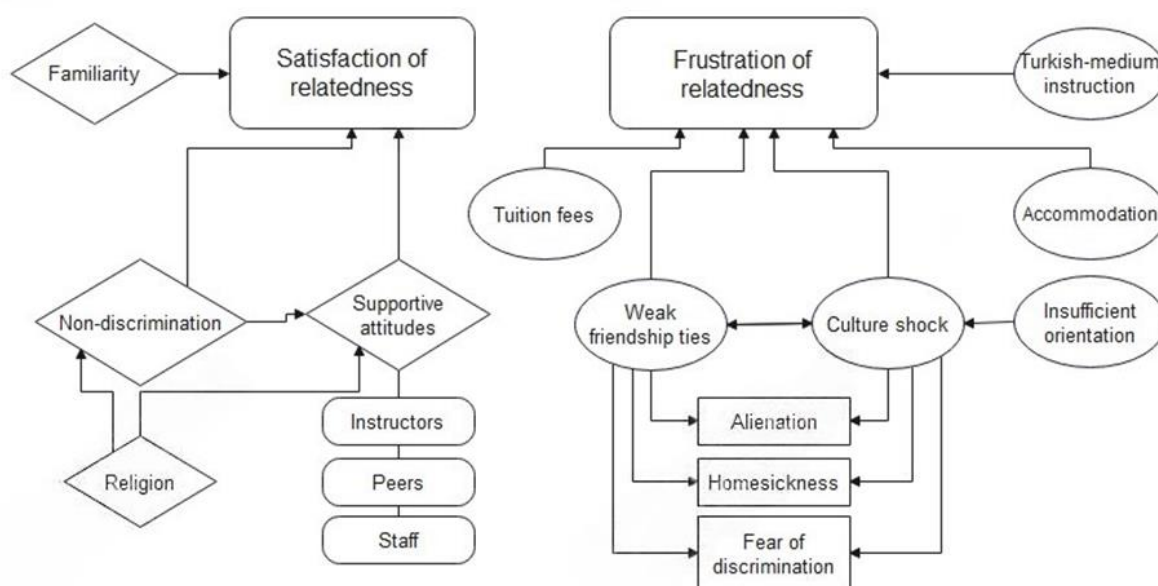
As illustrated in the model derived from the findings of the study (Figure 5), familiarity with the host country, non-discriminative, and even supportive attitudes of all the stakeholders in an EFL learning context are the primary factors contributing to the need of relatedness. In the context of the present study, believing in the same religion (Islam) is perceived to be an important underlying reason for non-discriminative attitudes towards international EFL students. On the other hand, economic difficulties such as tuition fees, weak friendship and culture shock which also lead to alienation, homesickness, and fear of being discriminated against by the host country students, seem to decrease the sense of relatedness. Culture shock in the research setting is mostly attributed to insufficient orientation of guest students. Lastly, it is interpreted that the accommodation problems and delivery of instruction in the Turkish language rather than English emerge as other fundamental reasons frustrating the relatedness need of the international EFL learners.

DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

The analysis of the data revealed that some of the common global reasons for studying abroad as an 'internationally mobile' student were also found in the Turkish tertiary EFL context. Yet, some particular reasons were also identified such as having family members or friends in the host country, enrolling in an English medium instruction (EMI) department, and perceiving the host country as a gateway to Europe. As another major reason, respondents referred to

reasonable tuition fees for choosing their host university. Although this factor seemed to play a key role in their choice, they also expressed their complaints on the increasing fees due to the financial conditions in Türkiye. As Jin and Wang (2018) also concluded, wars and political conflicts, especially in the Middle Eastern countries, appeared to have affected the respondent's choice of the host country. However, it should be noted that some students thought of the host country as a passage to a developed European country. This tendency among international students may be due to the employability opportunities in EU countries compared to Türkiye. Besides, the finding that some respondents chose to study in Türkiye and the host university seems to validate the proposition in the literature that students' perceptions of the educational quality and value of the host universities and countries influence the international mobility of the students (Abbott & Silles, 2016).

The findings also presented several factors contributing to the satisfaction of the international students' relatedness need. As Gest et al. (2005) found out in a different educational context, the EFL instructors in the host university seem to contribute much to this basic psychological need with their friendly and supportive attitudes. Positive experiences with their instructors are likely to foster stronger connectedness and emotional well-being among the international EFL learners (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2000), which in turn is likely to increase academic achievement (Munoz & Ramirez, 2015). In line with the previous research (Agawa, 2020; Furrer & Skinner, 2003), it was also found that positive interpersonal interactions with peers and student affairs staff at the school emerged as satiating factors in the present study. As an important finding, the respondents reported no instances of discrimination or racist behaviours in the Turkish context. The finding contradicts a number of previous studies (Lee & Rice, 2007; Smith & Khawaja, 2011) that pointed at the discrimination against the international students from less developed regions such as Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. Verbal insults, implied inferiority, and even physical harm caused by host students in the US were among the discriminative behaviours highlighted by Lee and Rice (2007). In this regard, Türkiye seems to be a favourable destination for internationally mobile students. The findings from the present research also suggest that some participants even felt privileged since they were seen as 'guests' by their instructors and schoolmates. However, it is important to note that this kind of welcoming attitude was not reported by the respondents from Syria and Iraq. In addition, besides being a factor for choosing Türkiye to study, being familiar with the host country or city emerged to satiate the relatedness need of the participants. Lastly, religion was also found to be an influential common ground to increase the sense of relatedness.

The most prominent factor frustrating the need for relatedness was found to be the weak friendship ties between the host and the international students. Considering the innate need of human beings to communicate with each other (Deci & Ryan, 2000), frustration of the need to establish a strong and sincere friendship with others is likely to decrease interaction and negatively affect the academic achievement of the international students. This situation often stems from the language barriers (Chen, 1999; Nazir & Özçiçek, 2023; Yan & Pei, 2018) between the international and the host country students. According to Yeh and Inose (2003), language barriers can even lead to feelings of alienation. Other recurring codes in the data were discovered as homesickness and alienation, which both result from relatedness frustration and in turn trigger it. In this regard, the findings are consistent with the findings in the literature, which highlight similar challenges experienced by international undergraduate students (Zhang & Goodson, 2011). Besides, culture shock, mostly as a result of first-time experience in the host country, emerged to be another frustrating variable. Intriguingly, it was understood that the participants were also afraid of discrimination though they had not reported any such behaviour. Unlike some other instances in the literature (Lee & Rice, 2007), the participants of the present study did not report any direct insults or racist behaviours but they still had concerns about possible hostile attitudes. This fear can be associated with the daily instances of discriminative behaviour and even racist actions presented by some radicals in the country. As another source of need frustration, lack of orientation programs for the international students in

the English preparatory program was articulated by the participants. Finally, the medium of instruction also appeared to be an important determinant of the relatedness need frustration.

The findings regarding the means to increase relatedness feelings among the international EFL learners in the present research indicate that social activities and orientation meetings could serve as effective ways to improve the sense of relatedness (Goode et al., 2024). Besides, in-class activities such as role plays, peer or group work, and instructional games were also listed among the useful techniques to be utilised by the instructors. This finding clearly aligns with the proposition by Agawa (2020) that the existence of a strong interaction and collaboration with peers plays a fundamental role in maintaining relatedness among learners. As another important finding, accommodation problems of the international students in their first years in the host country are of vital importance. As Paltridge et al. (2010) also highlight, feeling safe in a new country is a primary concern for these students, and this sense of safety is most likely to be supported through proper accommodation opportunities provided to the international students. Lastly, it was concluded that more reasonable tuition fees demanded from international students would increase their sense of relatedness, which is frequently mentioned in the literature as one of the challenges faced by this genuine group of learners (Sümer et al., 2008; Zhang & Goodson, 2011).

In an attempt to uncover the international EFL learners' relatedness feelings at the onset of their undergraduate studies, the present study came up with a number of significant factors leading to the satisfaction and frustration of this primary psychological need, as well as key reasons for choosing the host country and ways of increasing the satisfaction of the relatedness need. Given the importance of satisfying the need of relatedness and eliminating frustrating factors, the study is a remarkable attempt at delving into this primary psychological need of international students. It is concluded from the findings that Türkiye is home to international students mostly due to cultural and geographical reasons. Besides, interpersonal factors such as attitudes and relationships profoundly affect the sense of relatedness among the students. It is also concluded that activities fostering and strengthening the interpersonal relationships are assumed to increase the feelings of relatedness. Lastly, although no explicit form of it was reported by the participants, it is concluded that the international EFL learners in their first year at university have serious concerns regarding various forms of discrimination against them, and the likelihood of any form of latent discrimination should be handled carefully by the educational administrators, lecturers, and academic advisors.

The findings of this study shed light on the international EFL learners' relatedness needs in the Turkish context by delving into the possible reasons for the satisfaction and frustration of these needs, and further exploring the means to further pave the way for increasing the level of satisfaction among them. Given the importance of attitudes towards international students especially in their first years of undergraduate education, the instructors and educational leaders should establish a strong rapport with EFL learners in order to minimise the risks associated with decreased sense of relatedness. To be more precise, creating opportunities for collaborative learning, peer feedback, and social interaction in EFL classrooms can foster a sense of relatedness among learners (Ismailov & Ono, 2021). Furthermore, an awareness of being an international student should be created among the host country students to strengthen the friendship ties and reinforce peer-relatedness among the learners. To create such an awareness, orientation meetings, social events such as club activities, and intercultural weeks can be organised in EFL settings. On the other hand, the factors causing the frustration of relatedness, such as accommodation problems, tuition fees, and medium of instruction, should also be handled properly by the policymakers and other stakeholders. As a high sense of relatedness significantly boosts academic engagement and achievement in general (King, 2015), taking necessary steps to maintain a strong sense of relatedness among EFL learners would result in more desirable learning outcomes. As this study clearly reports the relatedness frustrating factors and possible precautions to take, its findings are expected to guide EFL instructors and administrators to increase the well-being and motivation of language learners.

Limitations of the Study

Due to the aim and scope of the present study, which particularly delves into the relatedness need of international EFL learners at a specific state university, it is seen that the participant profile is dominated by Middle Eastern nations. Though this is a reflection of the nationwide profile of the international students (Yılmaz & Güçlü, 2021), further studies with participants from more diverse backgrounds could come up with more generalizable findings. In this regard, data from different countries and even continents would yield more comprehensive and comparable results. Likewise, further studies could collect and analyse comprehensive quantitative data from international EFL learners in various learning contexts and countries in order to come up with a broader picture of their relatedness. Such research could also enable the scholars to compare and contrast the feelings of relatedness in terms of various variables to be determined depending on the settings.

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Statement of Contribution Rate

The entire process of the research was conducted by the sole author of the article.

Declaration of Conflict of Interest

As the author of the study, I declare no conflict of interest.

Statement of Publication Ethics

In the entire process from the planning and implementation of this research to the collection and analysis of data, all the rules specified in the "Directive on Scientific Research and Publication Ethics of Higher Education Institutions" were followed. None of the actions specified under the second section of the Directive, "Actions Contrary to Scientific Research and Publication Ethics", have been carried out.

During the writing process of this study, scientific, ethical and citation rules were followed; no falsification was made on the collected data and this study was not sent to any other academic publication environment for evaluation.

The participants were informed about the study and signed an informed consent form. They were also informed that their interview sessions were being recorded, and the data would only be used for research purposes and kept confidentially abiding by the laws and regulations.

Research ethics committee approval information

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZ

Giriş

Uluslararası öğrencilerin sayısı kişisel hedefler, küreselleşme, yükseköğrenimin uluslararasılaşması, finansal faktörler ve savaşlar gibi nedenlerle artış göstermektedir (Beine vd., 2014; Jin & Wang, 2018). Yurt dışında eğitim almak öğrencilere, daha iyi eğitim fırsatları yakalamak, vizyonlarını genişletmek, istihdam edilebilirliklerini artırmak ve yeni bir dil öğrenmek gibi birçok avantaj sağlarken, aynı zamanda ev sahibi ülkelere ve kurumlara da gelir kaynağı oluşturmak ve küresel vizyonu zenginleştirmek gibi faydalar sunar (OECD, 2023). Alan yazınında kültür şoku, dil engelleri, ırkçı tutumlar, yurt özlemi ve maddi zorluklar, uluslararası öğrencilerin karşılaştığı yaygın sorunlar arasında sayılmıştır (Zhang & Goodson, 2011). Bu zorluklar, öncelikle lisans eğitimlerinin ilk yılında yaşanmakta olup, üstesinden gelinmezse, öğrencilerin okulu bırakma veya depresyon gibi ciddi klinik belirtiler geliştirme olasılığı bulunmaktadır (Sümer vd., 2008). Türkiye'deki uluslararası öğrencilerin çoğu, İngilizce eğitim veren bölümlerde okumayı tercih ettikleri için İngilizce yeterlilik koşullarını sağlayamazlarsa, ilk yıllarını İngilizce hazırlık programında geçirirler. Yabancı dil öğrenme kaygısıyla birleştiğinde, uluslararası öğrenciliğin zorlukları öğrencinin temel psikolojik ihtiyaçlarından birisi olan bağlılık duygularını kolayca azaltabilir, bu da öğrenme motivasyonunun düşmesine ve program gerekliliklerini yerine getirememesine neden olabilir. Bu nedenle, uluslararası öğrencilerin zorlu İngilizce hazırlık yılı boyunca psikolojik iyilik hallerini dikkate almak, motivasyonlarını korumak ve programda başarılarını sağlamak açısından kritik bir rol oynamaktadır.

Yöntem

Çalışmada nitel bir durum çalışması araştırma deseni kullanmıştır. Veriler yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme tekniği ile toplanmış, kolaydaki örnekleme yöntemi izlenerek İngilizce hazırlık programına kayıtlı 23 uluslararası İngilizce hazırlık programı öğrencisi görüşmelere davet edilmiştir. Gönülsüz davranan ve çifte vatandaşlığı bulunan Türk öğrenciler çalışma dışında bırakıldığında 12 uluslararası öğrenci ile görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Toplanan veriler tekrar eden kodları, kategorileri ve temaları belirlemek amacıyla tematik analiz yöntemiyle analiz edilmiş, verilerin yüzde 20'si güvenilirliği sağlamak amacıyla bir başka nitel araştırma uzmanı tarafından kodlanmış ve saptanan kodlar karşılaştırılmış, uyumsuzluklar tartışılarak giderilmiştir.

Bulgular

Araştırma bulgularına göre uluslararası öğrenciler sıklıkla aile bireyleri, akrabaları veya arkadaşlarının etkisiyle ve hedef ülke dil ve kültürüne aşinalık nedeniyle Türkiye'de eğitim almayı tercih etmektedirler. Bazı öğrenciler ise Türkiye'nin yüksek kaliteli bir üniversite eğitimi almak için prestijli bir konum olduğunu belirtmiştir. Bağlılık hissini arttıran faktörlerin başında öğretim elemanlarının, öğrencilerin ve diğer personelin dostça, yardımsever ve destekleyici tutumları gelmektedir. Ancak, bu bulgu Suriye ve Irak'tan gelen katılımcılardan elde edilen verilerde belirgin olarak görülmemiştir. Ev sahibi ülke veya şehirle ilgili deneyim sahibi olmak ve aynı dine mensup olmak da bağlılıkta belirleyici rol oynamaktadır. Diğer yandan katılımcılar zayıf arkadaşlık bağlarını, memleket özlemi ve yabancılaşma hislerini bağlılık algılarını zayıflatan nedenler olarak görmektedirler. Kültür şoku da özellikle ev sahibi ülkede ilk kez bulunan katılımcılar tarafından dile getirilen faktörlerdendir. Bunun yanında gitgide artan öğrenim ücretleri bağlılık ihtiyacını baltalayan sebeplerdendir. Dikkate alınması gereken bir diğer bulgu ise katılımcıların herhangi bir ayrımcılığa maruz kalma konusunda endişeli olmalarıdır; oysa çalışmada sürekli olarak böyle bir deneyim yaşamadıklarını iddia etmişlerdir. Son olarak, bazı öğrencilerin bağlılık hissinin öğretim elemanlarının Türkçeyi öğretim dili olarak kullanmasından olumsuz şekilde etkilendiği anlaşılmıştır. Bağlılığın arttırılması amacıyla uluslararası öğrencilerin katılımının teşvik edileceği piknikler, festivaller, kültürlerarası günler, toplantılar, sanat ve spor etkinlikleri ile konuşma kulüpleri gibi sosyal etkinlikler düzenlenmesi önerilmiştir. Sınıf içerisinde öğretim elemanlarının özellikle çok kültürlü içerikler kullanarak

daha fazla eşli çalışma veya grup tartışması yapmaları beklenmektedir. Katılımcılar ayrıca öğrenim ücretlerinin düşürülmesi ve uluslararası öğrencilerin devlet yurtlarına kabul edilmesine izin veren düzenlemeler yapılması gibi adımları da bağlılığı artıracak faktörler olarak görmektedirler.

Tartışma ve Sonuç

Bu çalışma, uluslararası öğrenci olarak yurtdışında okumanın bazı yaygın küresel nedenlerinin mevcut çalışma bağlamında da saptandığını göstermiştir. Buna karşın, ev sahibi ülkede aile üyeleri veya arkadaşların bulunması, İngilizce eğitim veren bir bölüme kaydolma ve ev sahibi ülkenin Avrupa'ya bir kapı olarak görülmesi gibi bazı özel nedenler de bulunmuştur. Jin ve Wang (2018) tarafından da anıldığı gibi, özellikle Orta Doğu ülkelerindeki savaşlar ve siyasi çatışmaların katılımcıların ev sahibi ülke seçimlerini etkilediği görülmektedir. Ayrıca bulgular literatürde yer alan öğrencilerin ev sahibi üniversitelerin ve ülkelerin eğitim kalitesi ve değerine dair algılarının uluslararası hareketliliği etkilediği önermesini doğrular niteliktedir (Abbott & Silles, 2016).

Gest vd. (2005) tarafından farklı bir eğitim bağlamında ortaya koyulduğu gibi, öğretim elemanları dostça ve destekleyici tutumlarıyla bu temel psikolojik ihtiyaca büyük katkıda bulunmaktadır. Yaşadıkları olumlu deneyimler, öğrenciler arasında daha güçlü bir bağlılık ve duygusal iyilik hali geliştirmeye yatkın olup (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Ryan & Deci, 2000), bu da akademik başarıyı artırma olasılığını taşır (Munoz & Ramirez, 2015). Önceki araştırmalarla (Agawa, 2020; Furrer & Skinner, 2003) paralel olarak, okulda akranlar ve öğrenci işleri personeli ile olumlu kişilerarası etkileşimlerin bağlılığı destekleyici faktörler olarak ortaya çıktığı bulunmuştur. Ayrıca, katılımcılar Türkiye bağlamında ayrımcılık veya ırkçı davranışlara rastlamadıklarını bildirmişlerdir. Bu bulgu Asya, Afrika, Latin Amerika ve Orta Doğu gibi daha az gelişmiş bölgelerden gelen uluslararası öğrencilere yönelik ayrımcılığı işaret eden önceki çalışmalarla (Lee & Rice, 2007; Smith & Khawaja, 2011) örtüşmemektedir.

Bağlılık ihtiyacını engelleyen en belirgin faktörün Türk ve uluslararası öğrenciler arasındaki zayıf arkadaşlık bağları olduğu bulunmuştur. Bu durum genellikle uluslararası ve ev sahibi ülke öğrencileri arasındaki dil engellerinden kaynaklanmaktadır (Chen, 1999; Nazir & Özçiçek, 2023; Yan & Pei, 2018). Bu bağlamda bulgular, uluslararası lisans öğrencilerinin benzer zorluklar yaşadığını vurgulayan alan yazınındaki diğer bulgularla tutarlıdır (Yeh & Inose, 2003; Zhang & Goodson, 2011). Literatürdeki bazı diğer örneklerin aksine (Lee & Rice, 2007), bu çalışmanın katılımcıları doğrudan hakaret veya ırkçı davranışlar bildirmemelerine rağmen ayrımcı tavırlara ilişkin kaygıları sıklıkla ifadelerine yansımıştır. Bu korku, ülkedeki bazı radikallerin sergilediği günlük ayrımcı davranışlar ve hatta ırkçı eylemlerle ilişkilendirilebilir.

Mevcut alan yazınıyla uyumlu olarak bu araştırmada da sosyal aktiviteler ve oryantasyon toplantılarının (Goode vd., 2024), drama, grup çalışmaları ve eğitsel oyunlar gibi sınıf içi etkinliklerin katılımcıları iş birliği ve etkileşime yönelterek (Agawa, 2020) uluslararası öğrenciler arasında bağlılık duygularını geliştirebileceği saptanmıştır. Ayrıca Paltridge vd. (2010) tarafından da vurgulandığı gibi, yeni bir ülkede güvende hissetmek bu öğrenciler için birincil bir kaygıdır ve bu güvenlik hissi, uluslararası öğrencilere sağlanacak uygun konaklama fırsatlarıyla desteklenebilir. Son olarak, uluslararası öğrencilerden talep edilen daha makul öğrenim ücretlerinin, bu gerçek öğrenici grubunun karşılaştığı zorluklardan biri olarak literatürde sıkça bahsedilen bağlılık duygularını artıracağı sonucuna varılmıştır (Sümer vd., 2008; Zhang & Goodson, 2011).

Araştırmanın ortaya koyduğu bulgularla İngiliz dili eğitimi alanında görev yapan yükseköğretim planlamacıları, öğretim elemanları ve diğer paydaşlara uluslararası öğrencilerin bağlılık düzeylerini arttırma yönünde aksiyon almada yol gösterici olması beklenmektedir.