

Southern Caucasian Students' Perceptions of Turkey and Turkish People

Güney Kafkasyalı Öğrencilerin Türkiye ve Türk Algısı

Yıldız DEVECİ BOZKUŞ¹, Eda BEKÇİ ARI²

¹Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt Üniversitesi, İnsan ve Toplum Bilimleri Fakültesi, Ermeni Dili ve Edebiyatı
Anabilim Dalı, Ankara, Turkey

²Osmaniye Korkut Ata Üniversitesi, İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi, Uluslararası İlişkiler
Anabilim Dalı, Osmaniye, Turkey

Abstract: This study aims to measure and analyze the perceptions and attitudes of South Caucasian students, who have been educating in Turkish higher education institutions, on Turkey before and after their arrival in Turkey within the framework of the “soft power” mentality, that Turkey has recently opted for. Via the survey establishing the core of this study, it is intended to measure whether there is a change of perception on Turkey before and after the students' arrival in Turkey, and if there is a change of perception, this study tries to understand the direction of it. Moreover, this study also targets to put forward the common values between Turkey and South Caucasian countries, as well as to advise on what can be done to develop cooperation in the field of education and to strengthen the cultural ties and, additionally, social memory among regional countries. In other words, this study intends to put forward whether the South Caucasian students' perception of Turkey has progressively developed during their stay in Turkey.

Key Words: Perception Survey, South Caucasian, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia.

Özet: Bu çalışma Türkiye'nin son dönemde geliştirdiği “yumuşak güç” anlayışı çerçevesinde Türk yükseköğrenim kurumlarında eğitim gören Güney Kafkasya kökenli öğrencilerin Türkiye'ye gelmeden önce ve geldikten sonra Türkiye'ye yönelik algı ve tutumlarının ölçülmesi ve değerlendirilmesini amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışmanın odak noktasını oluşturan araştırma ile Güney Kafkasya ülkelerinden gelen öğrencilerin Türkiye'ye gelmeden önce ve geldikten sonra Türkiye hakkındaki algıları arasında bir değişim olup olmadığı ve değişim söz konusu ise bu değişimin ne yönde olduğunun ölçülmesi planlanmaktadır. Bununla beraber bu çalışma, Güney Kafkasya ülkeleri ile olan ortak değerlerin ortaya konulması, bölge ülkeleri arasında özellikle eğitim alanındaki işbirliğinin geliştirilmesi, Güney Kafkasya ülkeleri ile Türkiye arasında kültürel bağların ve buna ek olarak toplumsal belleğin güçlendirilmesi için neler yapılabileceği noktasında bazı çıkarımlar yapmayı da öngörmektedir. Diğer bir deyişle bu çalışma Türkiye'ye gelen öğrencilerin Türkiye'de buldukları süre zarfında Türkiye hakkındaki algılarının pozitif yönde gelişip gelişmediğinin tespitini de amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Algı Anketi, Güney Kafkasya, Türkiye, Azerbaycan, Gürcistan, Ermenistan.

1. Introduction

With the end of the Cold War, some existing concepts of international relations had begun to be elaborated with a new understanding beyond their conventional meaning. One of such redefined concepts, whose conceptual borders have been broadened, is the concept of “power”. Classical theories of international relations, especially realism, define power within a political/military context and perceive states as power-maximizing actors within the international system. On the other hand,

¹ yildizdeveci@gmail.com

² edabek@gmail.com

when the rigid bloc system of the Cold War began to loosen starting from the 1970s and particularly after the end of the Cold War, students of international relations began to think that economic and socio-cultural potential of states has been as significant as their political and military resources in terms of power production. Therefore, as Joseph Nye indicates, the concept of “soft power”, instead of “hard power” denoting political and especially military power, has begun to be used. Briefly defined, soft power is the capacity of a particular actor to change the preferences of another actor without using military power. In other words, soft power can be described as a political actor’s use of persuasion and consent instead of military power, in order to direct another political actor in line with its own interests (Nye, 2004: 5-11).

The most significant motivation for the conduct of this study is the intent to contribute to the determination of the problems that foreign students from South Caucasia in particular and foreign students in general encounter during their stay in Turkey. Therefore, it is planned that this report will be sent to the relevant bureaucratic units dealing with foreign students in Turkey in order to (1) increase the awareness of the relevant authorities on the problems encountered by the foreign students and (1) to strengthen their will to take initiatives for resolving these problems. The prospective amelioration attempts by these authorities with regard to the solution of the problems encountered by foreign students in Turkey would also contribute to a more positive perception of Turkey in South Caucasian states.

Recently, there emerged a significant rise in the number of foreign students coming to Turkey for getting their undergraduate, graduate and doctoral degrees and all universities tried to enhance their institutional capabilities to meet the expectations of these students. However, when it comes to the region of South Caucasia, in terms of institutional capabilities, there seem to be some deficiencies compared to the other regions of the world. To start with, within the Turkish universities and the departments of international relations, except for a few research institutes, there are not many research centers dedicated to research on the Caucasian region. In other words, this lack of interest in the region resulted in difficulties in understanding the specific problems of the South Caucasian students in Turkey during their education and stay in this country. Particularly, since the South Caucasian graduates from Turkish universities will come up with significant governmental, business and academic positions in their home countries, they will contribute to the bilateral relations between Turkey and their home countries. The positive attitudes and perceptions developed by these students in Turkey during their stay would enhance the future international relations vision of Turkey as well as strengthen the soft power elements developed by Turkey towards South Caucasia. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the increase the awareness of the Turkish educational decision-makers towards the problems experienced by South Caucasian students in Turkey and to inspire them to ameliorate these problems as much as possible.

2. Literature Review

Generally speaking, the perception surveys on foreigners’ perceptions of Turkey is very important considering the betterment of Turkey’s external image. A significant part of these perception surveys, on the other hand, is the surveys made with the foreign students. Within this framework, the research on the perceptions of students from South Caucasia, with which Turkey has had deep historical, cultural, political and economic ties, with regard to Turkey and Turkish culture, is strategically important for the determination of the policies designed towards the countries of this region.

The previous perception surveys with regard to Turkey show a great focal variety. Some of these studies were conducted over foreigners living abroad, while some others were conducted on foreigners learning Turkish as a foreign language focusing on their ability to learn Turkish as well as their perception of Turkish language and Turkish educational system (Tunçel 2016: 107-108; Güleç ve İnce, 2013: 95-106; Karatay ve Kartallıoğlu, 2012: 1-11). Other perception and attitude surveys on Turkey also include studies on the perceptions of foreigners, who either live abroad or live in Turkey,

and studies on the perceptions of Syrian refugees in Turkey, whose numbers have recently increased tremendously (Yirik- Uslu-Küçük (2015), 263-282, Dalar, Ayhan ve Ataman (2012), 33-37, Yıldız (2015), 141-169).

Besides, there are some studies on Caucasian and European students in Turkey, whose numbers are very limited, and therefore, their place in the literature is very much insignificant. For example, the survey made by Aliyev and Öğülmüş, entitled "An Investigation of Foreign Students' Perception of Intercultural Interaction in Turkey" was performed over 220 participants from Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and some European countries including Croatia, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Czech Republic, and Slovakia. This study argues that the students coming from Caucasian and Central Asian countries accommodate themselves better in Turkey compared to the students coming from European countries (Aliyev ve Öğülmüş, 2015, 63). According to Aliyev and Öğülmüş, the reason for higher interaction points of Caucasian/Central Asian participants is that similar cultures facilitate accommodation (Aliyev ve Öğülmüş (2015), 64).

Güleç and İnce performed a study via a direct interview with students from countries from different parts of the world including Turkmenistan, Yemen, Kuwait, Azerbaijan, Crimea, Uzbekistan, Colombia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia, Mongolia, Bulgaria, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia. In this study, they tried to assess the alimentation, dressing and entertainment trends of the students since their arrival in Turkey. The universe of the survey is formed by 138 Turkic or non-Turkic students from Sakarya University Turkish and Foreign Languages Research and Application Center (Türkçe ve Yabancı Dil Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi - TÖMER) and the sample of the survey is formed by 29 students from 13 different countries who had attended the education programs of this center. The results of this study revealed that the students had not many troubles in terms of dressing but have some problems with regard to alimentation and entertainment (Güleç ve İnce (2013), 98).

In another significant survey made with 15 foreign undergraduate students (from Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Greece, Uzbekistan and Georgia) studying in Turkey through semi-structured interview method, it was stated that the students had not experienced any kind of prejudice and exclusion in Turkey because of cultural proximity between Turkish culture and their own cultures. Moreover, this study tried to find out what kind of problems that these students have experienced in Turkey during their study, whether these problems influenced their studies and if they influenced their studies to what degree this influence was experienced. The results of this study revealed that although the foreign students had some degree of financial problems, they had not much-experienced accommodation problems (Kıroğlu, Kesten ve Elma (2010), 26-39).

In addition to the above-mentioned research, a more specific survey was conducted by Özdaşlı on the effects of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict and the impact of Turkish regional politics on Azerbaijani students. This survey, entitled "A Research for the Viewpoints of Azerbaijani University Students on Turkey-Azerbaijan Relations after Armenian Opening", evaluated the reconciliation attempts between Turkey and Armenia peaked at 2009 with the protocols signed between these two states and aimed to assess the attitudes of Azerbaijani students on this reconciliation process through questionnaires applied on 208 students via internet (Özdaşlı (2015), 318-326).

Another interesting study is entitled "Social Problems of Foreign Higher Education Students in Turkey: Case Study in SAP Region Universities". This study argues that foreign students generally preferred to go to European countries for studying because of the educational opportunities present in the European countries (Paksoy, Paksoy ve Özçalıcı (2012), 85-94).

In addition to these academic publications in Turkey with regard to the perception of foreign students with regard to Turkey, there are also some graduate theses in which this issue is thoroughly analyzed. One of these theses was prepared by Baki Karabayev, whose field research was performed on 372 students coming from Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Kyrgyzstan and studying in six different universities in Turkey. Different from the conventional literature this study argues that the negative perceptions of these students towards Turkish people are higher than their positive perceptions (Karabayev (2001)). Another point emphasized in this study is that although foreign

students came to Turkey with positive perceptions in mind, after they have lived some time in Turkey and got to know Turkey more; in other words, their perceptions became more negative as they acquainted with Turkish culture more (Karabayev (2001), 18).

Another thesis prepared by Bozkaya and entitled “The Perception of Armenian University Students and Academicians Living in Armenia on Turkey’s Membership to the European Union” and it examines the perception of the Armenian students and academicians on Turkey instead of foreign students living in Turkey. Özkaya argues that the existing perception of Turkish and Armenian communities was based on 1915 incidents which resulted in prejudices in front of mutual understanding. This survey was made in line with a questionnaire applied towards 444 Armenian students and academicians in Yerevan and it was a thorough study on their perception of Turkey’s prospective membership process to the European Union (Bozkaya (2016)).

Again, although not much relevant to this current study, another graduate thesis prepared by Terzi entitled “Turkey’s Grand Student Project” is quite conspicuous (Terzi (2013)). In this survey, Terzi’s sample group was the foreign students with scholarships, who came to Turkey for studying since 1992. Not only the questionnaires and interviews with these students but also the letter of intentions that these students had prepared for their application in Turkish universities were studied in this survey in order to put forward these students’ perception of Turkey and the problems that they had encountered during their stay in this country. The sample group was mainly formed by students coming from Central Asian Turkic Republics and countries like Bulgaria, Macedonia, Kosovo and Iran in which many Turkic communities have been living. The reason for these students to choose Turkey as a country of study were found as the higher quality of education, higher quality of the academic cadres, international recognition of Turkish university, special opportunities provided by Turkey, the impact of former graduates of Turkish universities and presence of Turkish language as the language education (Terzi (2013)). Moreover, in this survey, the data delivered from the exchange programs such as Fulbright program of the US, Chevening program of the UK and DAAD program of Germany, was compared with the data obtained from the questionnaires and interviews and some proposals were made for the amelioration of the “Turkey’s Grand Student Project”.

Another significant study made on the social activities of the foreign students studying in Turkey was the graduate thesis entitled “The Factors That Effect Foreign University Students Social Adaptation”. This study mainly analyzes the problems that the foreign students have encountered during their study in Turkey such as the problems of adaptation as well as the factors of age, gender, financial situation, accommodation, the city of living, friendship relations, and participation to socio-cultural and sportive activities together with their level of content with their education.

Additionally, another important research on this topic is the graduate thesis entitled “Kayseri, Turkey and Islam Perceptions of the Foreign Students Who Study in Kayseri”, whose results are published as an article. In this article, it was revealed that there are positive and negative implications of long-term living in Turkey on the foreign students’ perception of Turkey. (Göver ve Yavuzer (2015), 1027).

In addition to these academic publications, a questionnaire made in 2012 by one of the most important research institutes particularly in the field of Turkish Studies, Wise Men Strategic Research Center (Bilge Adamlar Stratejik Araştırmalar Merkezi - BİLGESAM), is one of the most significant studies on the perception of Turk and Turkey in Armenia. As a result of the field research with a sample group of 387 people, it was found out that the least level of sympathy of the Armenian people was towards the Turks (% 24,4) (Akyürek ve Bilgiç (2012), 19). Another important point touched upon in this study was that the sympathy felt towards the Turks by Armenians who had visited Turkey or who had met with the Turks was higher compared to others. According to the authors, it is because of the lack of knowing each other, which nurtured existing prejudices and enmities among Turkish and Armenian peoples (Akyürek ve Bilgiç (2012), 20). Although this study presented significant data in order to ameliorate Turkish-Armenian relations since it was designed for understanding the perception of Turk and Turkey by the Armenians, it did not comprise the Armenian students who had been or is

still being present in Turkey for studying. Therefore, it fails to explain positive or negative changes emerged out of living in Turkey for a long time on the perception of Turk and Turkey.

All in all, most of the studies on the perceptions towards Turkey and Turkish people focus on the resident foreigners in Turkey, while there are some surveys in the literature on the perceptions of the foreign students. Among these studies, while there were some focusing on Georgian and Azerbaijani students, the most significant problem in the literature is the lack of enough studies on the Armenian students in Turkey. Moreover, there emerge some inconsistencies when these studies are analyzed comparatively. The most important contribution of this study, on the other hand, is its simultaneous analysis of the perceptions of Georgian, Armenian and Azerbaijani students on Turk and Turkey as well as the socio-cultural problems that they have been encountering in Turkey in a comparative manner.

3. The Purpose, Scope, Limitations and the Research Methodology

In line with the data obtained as a result of a questionnaire applied on a sample representing the target group, this project aims to compare and contrast the perception of South Caucasian students, who have been studying in Turkey, on Turkey before and after their arrival in this country as well as to reveal relevant data for determining the strategies and precautions in order to maximize the outcome of the opportunities provided for these students. Thereby, it intends to answer whether the presence in Turkey for educational purposes has any impact on the sharpening of the perceptions of Turkey and if there is such an impact, whether it shapes this perception positively or negatively.

In this survey, students from Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, who have come to Turkey for language education as well as for undergraduate and graduate studies are randomly chosen and interviewed. During these interviews, the students are expected to continue their studies in a Turkish institution and still live in Turkey. Moreover, they are expected to spend at least three months of their academic life as a student in one of the educational institutions in Turkey even including the fields of music, art, and theatre.

During the preparation phase of this study, first, a thorough literature survey is accomplished in a way to examine similar studies. As a result of this literature survey, it is found that no particular study comprising the perceptions of South Caucasian students has existed. It is also understood that as a result of the bilateral problems emerged out of the lack of diplomatic relations between Turkey and Armenia, the closure of the Turkish-Armenian border and the recognition of 1915 Armenian relocation as genocide in Armenia, the number of Armenian students in Turkey is negatively affected. Indeed, most of the survey companies, which have been consulted in preparing this report, stipulated that it would be problematic to conduct such a survey for the Armenian students because of inadequate number of Armenian students in Turkey and the reluctance of most of these students in participating in the survey because of their fear of revealing their identities. This problem turned out to be the most important problem during the preparation of the survey and could only partially be overcome via the efforts of the Armenian associations in Turkey. Only after the persuasion of some Armenian students by these associations, the survey could be conducted on a limited number of Armenian students. These students were assured of the protection of their identity through a quality standard for researchers known as "Trustworthy Research Certificate" and only after that they accepted to participate in the survey. These delays emerged out of the persuasion process of the Armenian students resulted in the demand for additional time for the conduct of the survey unexpected in the project schedule. Despite all these efforts, the number of Armenian students participated in the survey was just 16, compared to the 55 Azerbaijani and 58 Georgian students.³ Therefore the total number of students interviewed was 129.

³ Indeed, in order for the data obtained through a survey to be influential in determining future strategies, the minimum number of statistically reportable sample is generally accepted to be 30. The data obtained from the number of samples below that cannot be accepted as concrete data though they can be considered for evaluation. The difference of the number of samples among groups is important in determining the difference of magnitude of percentage ratios for comparison between two groups. Therefore, in the research with different sample groups, the difference between the number of participants influence the analysis and evaluation procedures.

Another limitation of this survey is the geographical limitation. This study solely focuses on the South Caucasian students coming from Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. Of course, it can be said that the evaluation of the perception of students, coming to a broader region including North Caucasia or Caucasia in general, on Turkey before and after their arrival in Turkey, might have produced more fruitful results. However, the limits of this survey are determined as South Caucasia and this study is expected to open the way for researchers for further and similar research on North Caucasia or Caucasia in general.

The third limitation of this survey is the lack of a particular higher education institution in Turkey providing education directly for the Caucasian students. Therefore, the students with which the interviews have been conducted are determined through the data obtained from the system of Higher Education Council (Yüksek Öğretim Kurumu – YÖK). Through this data, it is possible to determine the department preferences of the students coming from South Caucasia to Turkey for higher education. The departments most widely preferred by the Georgian students are Theology, Medicine, Law, Tourism, and French Language Teaching. The basic choice of Azerbaijani students seems to be Business Administration, while Economics, Mining Engineering, Tourism, and Law are other important fields of study. The Armenian students, on the other hand, generally prefer French Language Teaching and Tourism, however, the inadequacy of the number of Armenian students should be kept in mind.

The survey is made in accordance with the previous data and performed in educational institutions where South Caucasian students are studying and thanks to the help of some associations and a wider distribution of students is tried to be accomplished. The number of interviews during the survey is shown in the figure below:

Figure 1. The number of questionnaires and percentages of foreign students with regard to their nationality

The nationality of the student	The number of questionnaires	The percentage according to nationality
Azerbaijan	55	%42,6
Georgia	58	%45,0
Armenia	16	%12,4

In the survey, the primary data gathering technique is used. The questionnaires are performed in the institutions of the students by random choice and the face-to-face questionnaire (paper-pen) method is employed.

The field research was made in universities with a random choice between 1 and 27 March 2017. The questionnaires were performed in eight universities via face-to-face interviews. For these questionnaires, during the field research field control, and after the field research telephone control was made. For the field research, the questionnaires were controlled by 20 % by telephone and 10 % in the field.

There are nine demographic questions (the questionnaire form – section 1) and five other questions asked to understand the students' perception of Turkey. The demographic questions are about gender and age of the students, the time period that they have spent in Turkey, the province of residence in Turkey, the financial situation of their families and their scholarship situations.

22 questions were asked to the students about their educational process in Turkey. Some statements are given to the students in order to assess their perceptions of Turkey before and after their arrival in this country and what they thought of these statements was asked. The statements are organized with a 5-point Likert scale and the degree of students' agreement with these statements was

tried to be measured. The evaluations towards these statements were as follows: 5 for “absolutely agree”, 4 for “agree”, 3 for “neither agree nor disagree”, 2 for “disagree”, 1 for “absolutely disagree” and 9 for NA/NI (no answer / no idea).

4.The Analysis and Results of the Survey Conducted with South Caucasian Students

4.1. Demographic characteristics

As illustrated in Figure 2., when the gender distribution of the students is examined, 58,9% of the students are male and 41,1% of the students are female. In addition, as can be seen in Figure 3., while most of the of the Azerbaijani students are males (51,9 %), the students from Armenia and Georgia are mostly females (20% and 43,9 % respectively).

Figure 2. Gender distribution of the students

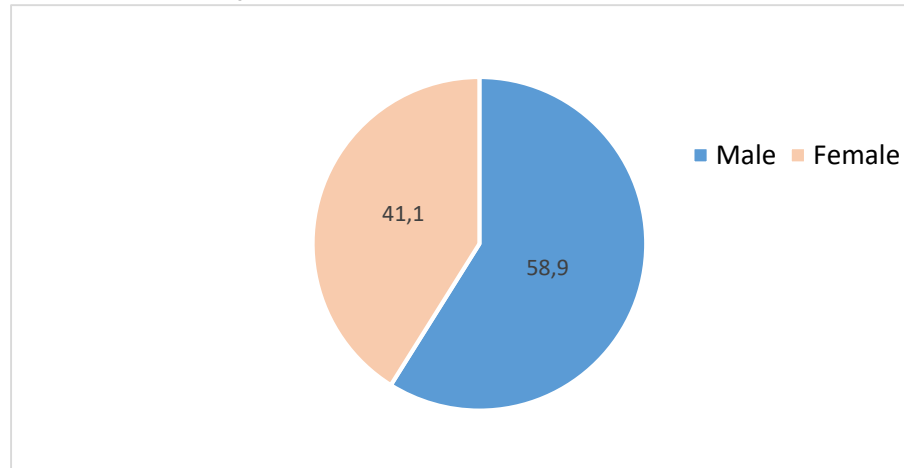
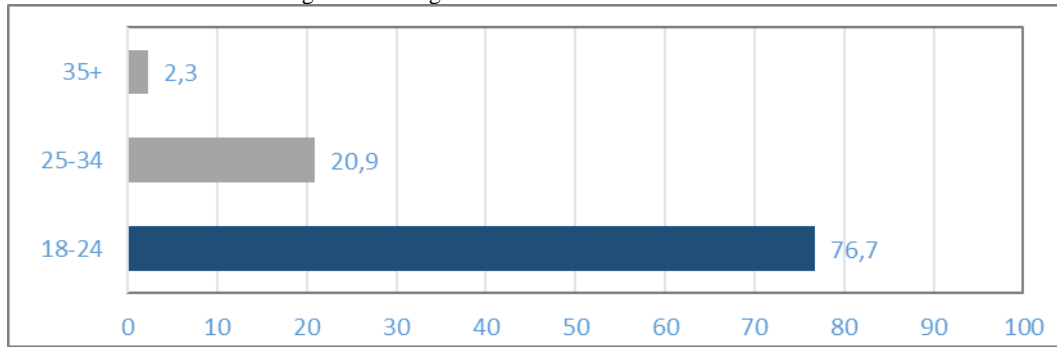


Figure 3. Gender distribution of the students with regard to their nationality

Nationality of the Student	Male	Female
Georgia	%41,6	%43,4
Azerbaijan	%51,9	%35,8
Armenia	%6,5	%20,8
TOTAL	%100	%100

Below- presented figure (Figure 4.), on the other hand, illustrates the age distribution of the foreign students who attended the survey. As it is illustrated in the figure, when the age distribution of the respondents was examined, most of the students (76,7%) are between 18 and 24, while 20,9 % are between 25 and 34 and only 2,3 % are more than 35 years old.

Figure 4. The age distribution of the students



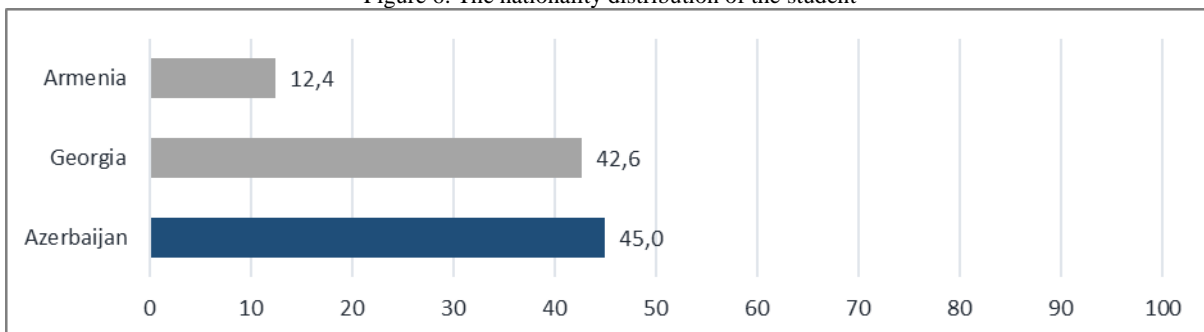
In addition, the age distribution of the respondents regarding their nationalities is illustrated in Figure 5. As can be observed in the following figure, while none of the Azerbaijani and Armenian students are older than 35, 5,5% of the Georgian students more than 35 years old. Nevertheless, regarding their nationalities, most of the students are between the ages of 18-24. More precisely, most of the Georgian, Azerbaijani and Armenian students who attended the survey are younger than 25. The ratio of the Georgian students between the ages of 18-24 is 70%, Azerbaijani students 81,0% and the Armenian students 81.3%.

Figure 5. Age distribution of the students with regard to their nationality

The nationality of the student	18-24	25-34	35+
Georgia	70,9%	23,6%	5,5%
Azerbaijan	81,0%	19,0%	0,0%
Armenia	81,3%	18,8%	0,0%

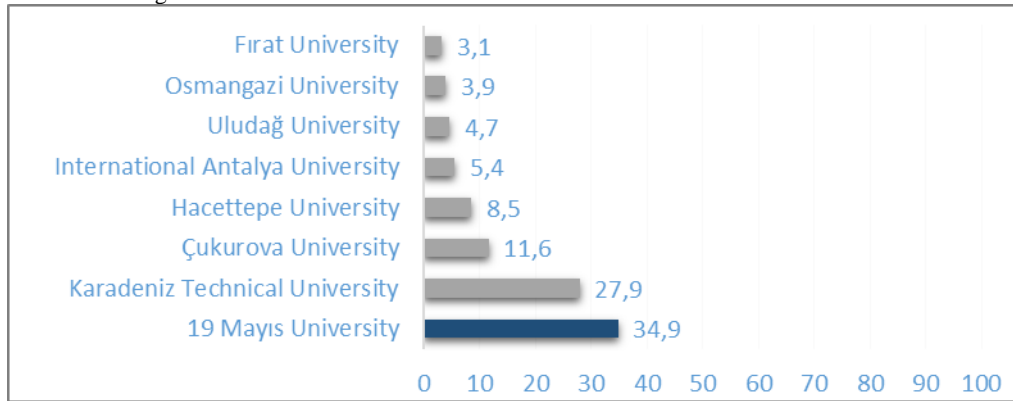
As Figure 6. depicts, when the nationalities of the students interviewed is examined, it is found out that the 42,6 % of the participants are Georgian, 45 % are Azerbaijani and 12,4 % are Armenian. As we have stated in the limitations section of this research, the number of Armenian students participated in the survey was just 16, compared to the 55 Azerbaijani and 58 Georgian students. It is important to reiterate that this is mostly engendered by the fact that the number of Armenian students in Turkey are inadequate when compared to the number of the Azerbaijani and Georgian students. In addition, most of the Armenian students living in Turkey are reluctant to contribute to the survey due to the fear of revealing their identities.

Figure 6. The nationality distribution of the student



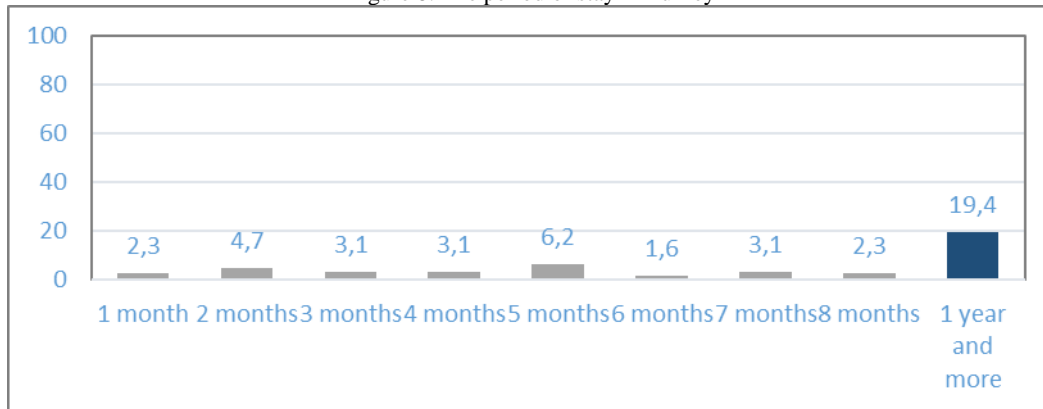
Besides, Figure 7. depicts the universities in which the interviews are made. As can be seen in the figure (Figure 7.) most of the questionnaires have been conducted in Samsun 19 Mayıs University with a rate of 34,9%. The most-widely preferred department of study by the South Caucasian students interviewed is Theology with a rate of 9,3%. The subsequent departments are Business Administration, French Language Teaching and Tourism Administration.

Figure 7. The education facilities in which the students are interviewed



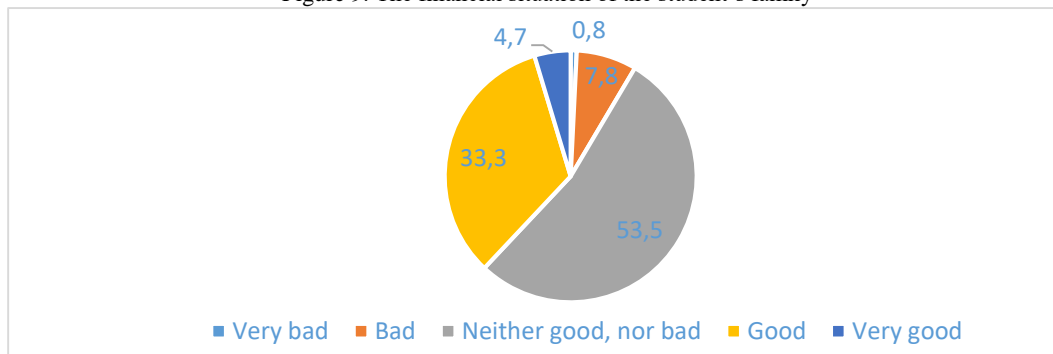
Below-presented figure (Figure 8.) illustrates the findings on the period of stay in Turkey. One can clearly observe in the figure that, when the students' period of stay in Turkey is examined, almost one out of five students has been staying in Turkey for more than a year. The average period of stay in Turkey, on the other hand, is 17 months.

Figure 8. The period of stay in Turkey



The ninth figure (Figure 9), on the other hand, depicts the findings on the question of the financial situations of the foreign students' families. According to the findings, 38% of the students answered that the financial situation of their families is good; while 53,5% of the students told that the financial situation of their families is in the medium range.

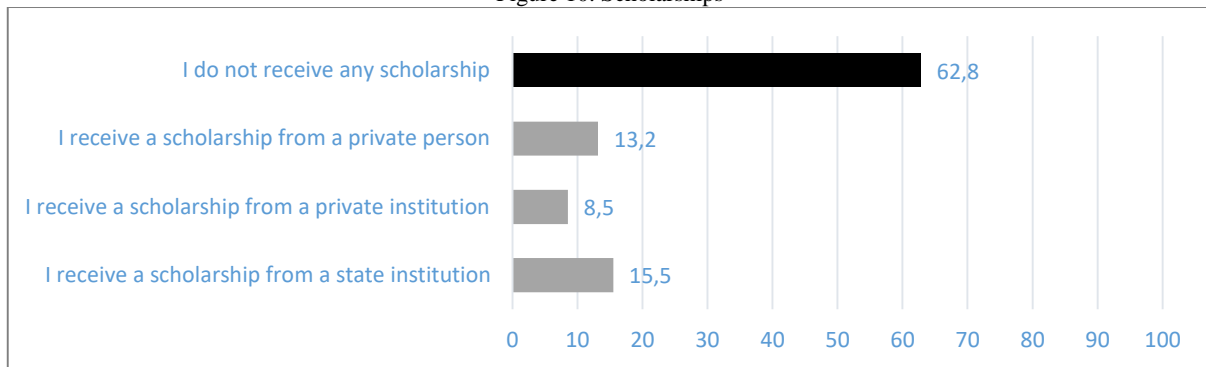
Figure 9. The financial situation of the student's family



When the scholarship situation of the students is examined, it is observed that almost 40% of the students receive scholarships. As can be seen in Figure 10., the rate of receiving a state scholarship

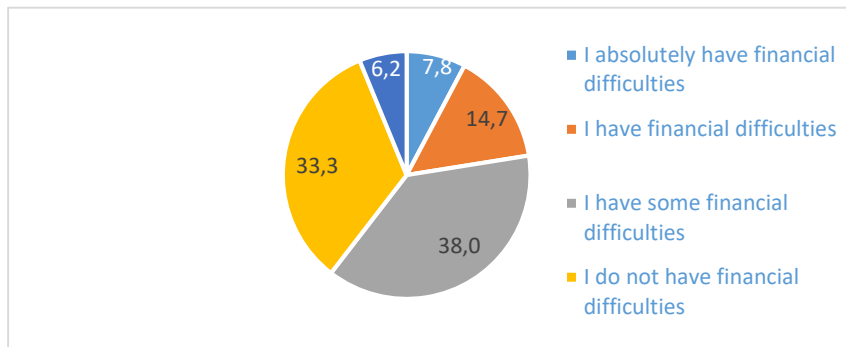
is the highest in the Georgian students since 27,3% of the Georgian students receive scholarships. On the contrary, 80% of the Azerbaijani students do not receive any scholarships.

Figure 10. Scholarships



The following figure (Figure 11.) illustrates the responses to the question of do you have any financial difficulties in living in Turkey or have you experienced any financial difficulties while you were living in Turkey? As can be seen in the figure, only 6,2% of the students stated that they absolutely had financial difficulties while they were living in Turkey. Nevertheless, the percentage of the respondents who stated that they do not have any financial difficulties at all is 7,8. On the other hand, most of the students stated that they have some financial difficulties while they are living in Turkey, with a rate of 38%. The rate of those who state that they experience financial difficulties in Turkey is 22,5%.

Figure 11. The Percentage of Encountering Financial Difficulties



Most of the foreign students accommodate in a private apartment or dormitory during their stay in Turkey. As one can clearly observe in Figure 12, only 3,1 % of the students are living with their relatives. According to the findings of the research on the places of accommodation in Turkey regarding the students' nationalities, while most of the Georgian and Azerbaijani students are living in private apartments, the rate of the Armenian students living in private apartments is only 12,5 %. As can be seen in Figure 13., 87,5 % of the Armenian students stated that they are living in dormitories.

Figure 12. Accommodation in Turkey

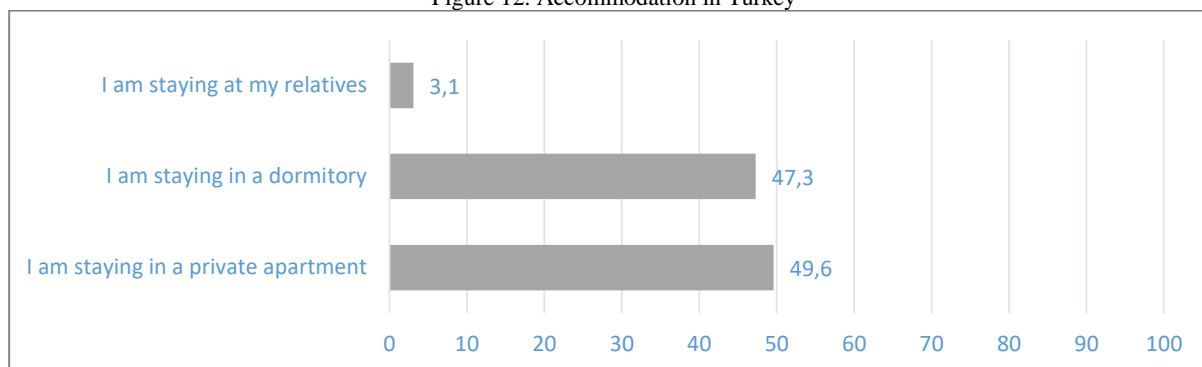


Figure 13. The Place of accommodation of the students with regard to their nationality

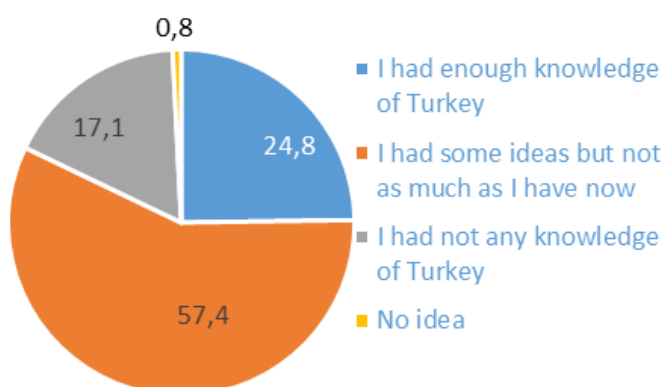
Nationality of the student	I am staying at a private apartment	I am staying at a dormitory	I am staying at my relatives	TOTAL
Georgia	%43,6	%50,9	%5,5	%100
Azerbaijan	%65,5	%32,8	%1,7	%100
Armenia	%12,5	%87,5	%0,0	%100

5. The Perceptions of Foreign Students to Turkey

5.1. Perceptions before their arrival in Turkey

According to the findings of the survey, 82,2% of the students declared that they had some knowledge of Turkey before they arrived in Turkey, though their knowledge before their arrival was less than their present knowledge. This rate is a bit higher for Georgian students. 54 % of the students responded to the question of did you know enough about Turkey before you live in Turkey that they had some ideas about Turkey. As it is illustrated in the following figure (Figure 14.), only 0,8 % of the students stated that they had no idea about Turkey before their arrival.

Figure 14. Foreign students' perception of turkey prior to living in Turkey



It is also important to note that, as one can observe in the following figure (Figure 15.), it was only the Armenian students who stated that they had no idea about Turkey before their arrival. To be more precise, while none (0,0 %) of the Georgian and Azerbaijani students stated that they had no idea

about Turkey before their arrival, 6,3 % of the Armenian students asserted that they had no idea about Turkey before their arrival.

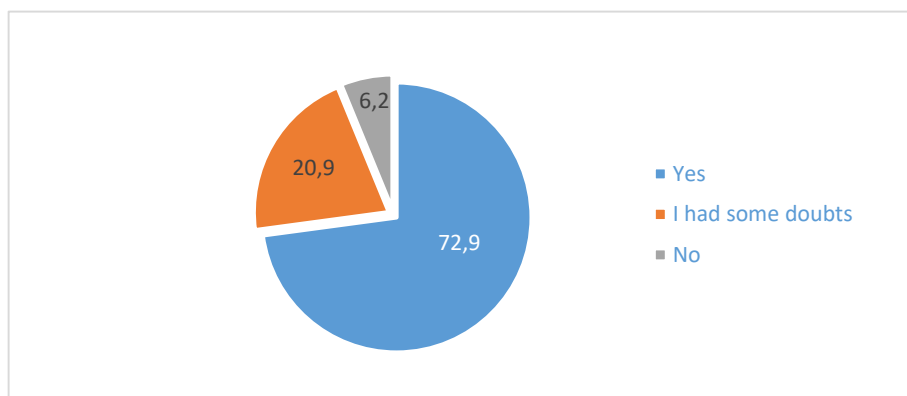
Figure 15. The perception of students on Turkey prior to their arrival with regard to their nationality

Nationality of the student	I had enough knowledge of Turkey	I had some ideas but not as much as I have now	I had not any knowledge of Turkey	No idea
Georgia	%18,2	%54,5	%27,3	%0,0
Azerbaijan	%32,8	%56,9	%10,3	%0,0
Armenia	%18,8	%68,8	%6,3	%6,3

5.1.1 The demand for education in Turkey

Most of the foreign students had a strong will to come to Turkey for studying. Most of the students who have some doubts about studying in Turkey are Georgians and Armenians.

Figure 16. Foreign students' demand for education in Turkey



Below-presented figures (Figures 17, 18 and 19.) depict the answers to the question of did you want to study in Turkey before you have arrived in Turkey. It was asked the students to choose one of the answers among “yes”, “no” or “I have some doubts” and it was asked to tell “why”. According to the findings, the most popular response to the questions of “why” among the students who answered “yes” to the previous question is “the quality of the education in Turkey” (11,5 %) This answer was followed by the answer because “I was interested in/ wonder about Turkey” (10 %). The least popular answers to the same question on the other hand are “because Turkey is a neighbor country with a close culture to my own” and “because Turkey’s conditions are much more advantageous” both with a rate of 3.8 %.

As can be seen in Figure 19., students who answered “no” to the question of did you want to study in Turkey before you have arrived in Turkey, stated that they did not want to come to Turkey either because they want to study in another country or because they do not want to separate themselves from their families.

5.2 The evaluation of educational processes in Turkey

It is observed that more than half of the foreign students could be able to handle their bureaucratic issues except for some minor problems. Most of the students, who argue that they experience serious problems, are the Azerbaijani students with a rate of 13,8%.

When the answer of the foreign students to this particular question is examined, it is observed that 63,6% of them have some problems in establishing friendships. Those who argue for experiencing problems in this respect are Georgian and Armenian students in general.

Figure 17. The reasons for foreign students for demanding education in Turkey

The answers of students who answered "yes"	%
Because I trusted the quality of education	11,5
I was interested in / wonder about Turkey	10,0
I loved Turkey	9,2
Because I wanted to learn about another country/culture	6,9
I wanted to study abroad	5,4
Because Turkey is a neighbor country with a close culture to my own	3,8
Because Turkey's conditions are much more advantageous	3,8

Figure 18. The reasons for foreign students for hesitating about education in Turkey

The answers of students who answered "I have some doubts" (n: 35)	%
Because Turkey was an unknown country / I had the fear of not adapting to Turkey	10,0
Our financial situation is not good / I have the fear of experiencing financial difficulties	3,8
I did not want to separate myself from my family/country	3,8
I wanted to study in my own country but I am accepted by the Turkish university as well	3,1
I came here for work	3,1

Figure 19. The reasons for international students for being reluctant about education in Turkey

The answers of students who answered "no" (n:8)	%
I wanted to study in another country	2,3
I did not want to separate myself from my family	1,5

Figure 20. The percentage of encountering bureaucratic difficulties in Turkey

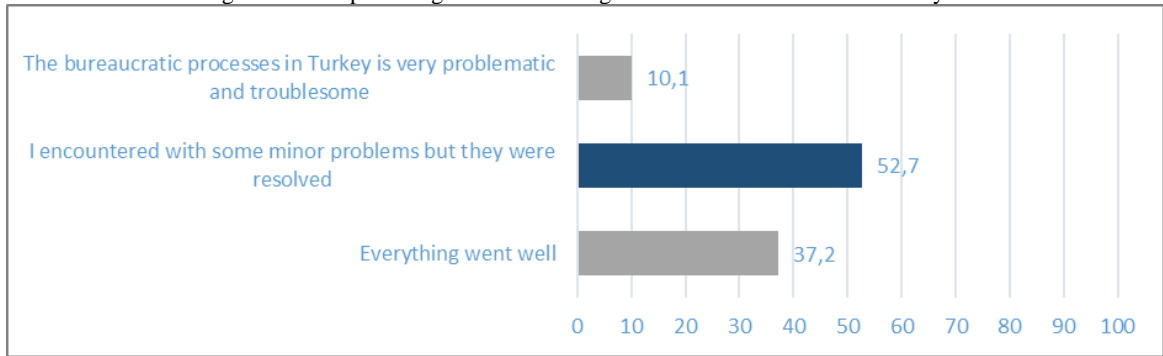
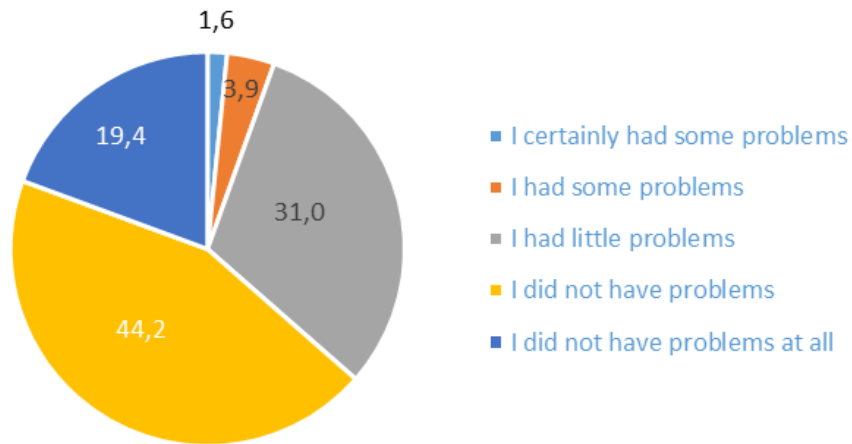


Figure 21. The tendency of foreign students in establishing social links



When the answer of the foreign students to this particular question is examined, it is observed that 39,5% of them feel partially or totally excluded. Most of the students answering in this way are Georgian or Armenian students. The most significant reason for this feeling of exclusion in Turkey seems to be the cultural differences. Interestingly, it is the Azerbaijani students who feel to be excluded because of cultural differences.

Figure 22. The state of exclusion of the foreign students in Turkey

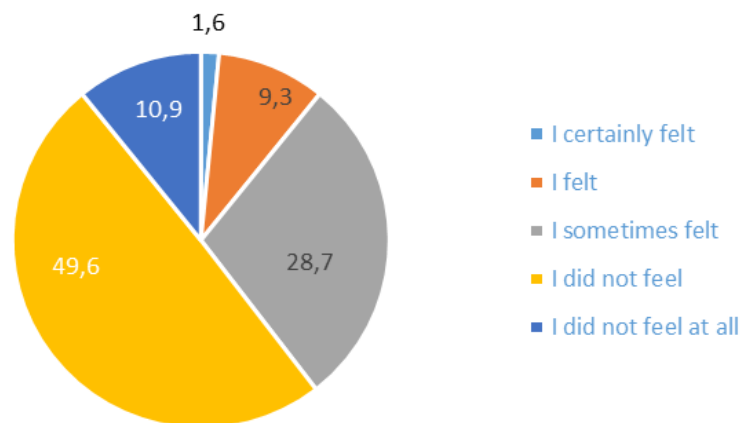
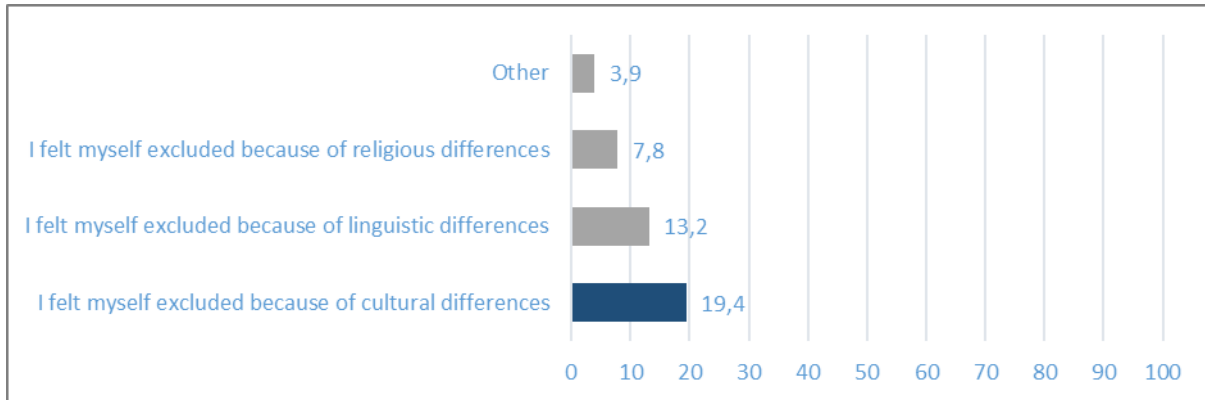
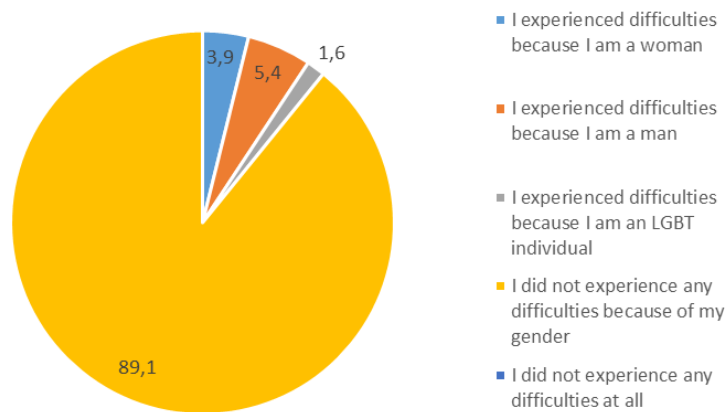


Figure 23. The Reasons for Exclusion of the Foreign Students in Turkey



It is observed that most of the foreign students do not experience any problem emerged out of sexist approaches. As Figure 16. demonstrates, 89,1% of the respondents stipulated that they do not experienced any difficulties of their genders.

Figure 24. Gender-based Approaches in Turkey



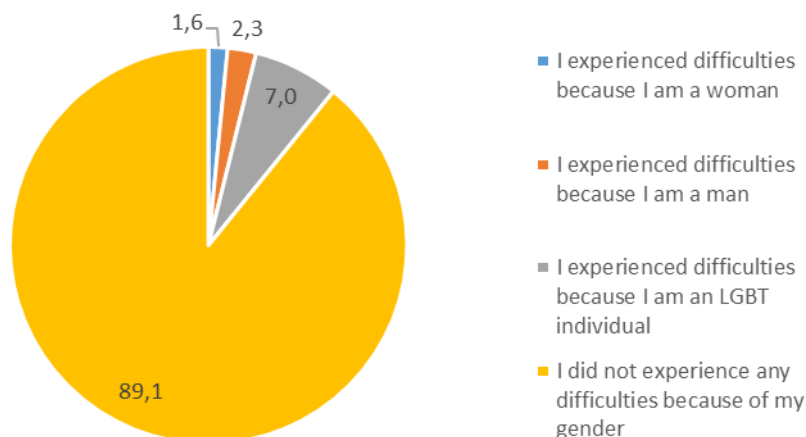
However, the ratio of experiencing some difficulties because of gender-based approaches increase in the educational facilities a bit. As can be seen in Figure 24., 3,9 % percent of the woman respondents stated that they experienced difficulties because of their gender. Evidently, this shows that in smaller environments, where people know each other more, sexist approaches become more visible.

According to the survey, the number of foreign and Turkish friends of 41,1 % of the foreign students are equal. The ratio of foreign students having friendship solely with foreign students is 35,7%. Azerbaijani students are the ones having the least difficulty in establishing a friendship with the Turkish students.

The ratio of participation in social activities is only 40,3%. The social activities that they participate in the most are listed below. When the frequency of participating social activities is examined it is observed that the students participate in such activities for once or when they find time to do so.

55% of the students stipulate that they do not experience any difficulty in participating in social activities. 11,6% of students think that they experience difficulties because they are foreign students.

Figure 25. Sexist Approaches in the Educational Facility in Turkey



When the level of content of the students with regard to the frequency of social activities, it is observed that almost half of them is content; however, students stating that they have no idea reaches a high ratio such as 32,6%, most of whom are the Georgian students.

It is observed that foreign students have not experienced many difficulties in terms of dressing.

The ratio of students who think that they have partially or certainly have difficulties with regard to alimentation is 51,2%. Most of the students thinking in this way are Georgian or Armenian students.

Although generally, foreign students do not think that they have a particular problem with regard to customs and traditions in Turkey, those, who argue that they have some difficulties, reach to a high percentage (45%), most of whom are Georgian or Armenian students.

When the foreign students are asked to what extent their educational expectations have been met or not, 57,4% of the students stated that their educational expectations have been met.

Respondents were asked to evaluate their perception with regard to Turkey before their arrival in this country, according to the findings of the survey it is observed that the general perception is positive.

In addition, it is observed that the students change their mind negatively considering some expressions like “I perceive Turkish culture closer to my own culture”, “Standard of living in Turkey is high”, “There is too much conflict, disturbance, and chaos in Turkey”. Moreover, Turkey is perceived to be more conservative, when the respondents were asked how their perceptions are changed after their arrival in Turkey.

5.3. The Perception of Students on Living in Turkey in the Long Term

24,8% of foreign students have a positive perception of living in Turkey in the long term. Most of the students, on the other hand, do not have a clear vision of living in Turkey in the long term. It is the Azerbaijani students that have the most positive feeling of living in Turkey in the long term since 32,8% of the Azerbaijani students clearly state that they want to live in Turkey in the near future.

When the ratio of foreign students’ advisability of living in Turkey is examined, it is observed that almost two-thirds of the foreign students, particularly Azerbaijani and Georgian students, advise living in Turkey. The number of students who state that they would not advise living in Turkey is very low.

6. Results and Discussion

When the results of the questionnaire are evaluated in the light of the demographic data, it is observed that the sample group is more or less equally divided in terms of gender (58,9% male vs. 41,1% female) and most of them (76,7%) are between the ages of 18 and 24. When the universities

that these students have been studying are examined, it is understood that generally the universities in the Black Sea region are preferred. 34,9% of the students preferred Samsun 19 Mayıs University and 27,8% of the students preferred Karadeniz Technical University in Trabzon. This situation can be explained with geographical proximity because from both provinces (Samsun and Trabzon) regular bus services are available to the South Caucasian countries. It is also observed that almost one of each five students resides in Turkey for more than a year meaning that it is possible to compare and contrast the perceptions of foreign students on Turkey since there is a considerable time period for the emergence of a change in the perceptions.

Concerning the examination of the financial situation of the students, it is understood that generally, the students are from families with a medium range of income. Since the ratio of students who state that their financial situation is bad or too bad is 8,6%, it can be argued that generally, families with a relatively higher income were able to send their children for education in Turkey. In order to finance the accommodation and education costs in Turkey, only 37,2 percent of the students receive a scholarship from a private person, a private institution or a state institution. Moreover, only 22,5% of the students argue that they experience financial difficulties in Turkey. These two additional data form a strong indication for supporting the argument that the financial situation of the families of foreign students is relatively good.

Regarding the type of accommodation of the students, it is found out that half of the Georgian students stay in dormitories whereas most of the remaining half stay in private apartments. The ratio of preferring private apartments is higher for Azerbaijani students. Quite contrarily, most of the Armenian students (87,5%) prefer to stay in dormitories. This is so either because the Armenian students feel more secure in institutional accommodation or because the landlords in Turkey are reluctant to rent their apartments to Armenian students. However, in order to understand the reasons for this preference better, further surveys should be performed.

It can be argued that the South Caucasian students studying in Turkey have a degree of knowledge of this country prior to their arrival. Only 17,1% of the students argue that they have had no idea about Turkey prior to their arrival. It is quite interesting that most of the students arguing that they have had no idea about Turkey before their arrival is Georgian. This gives the impression that the Azerbaijani students have known Turkey because of linguistic and cultural similarities, whereas, contrarily, the Armenian students have known Turkey because of the negative common past of Turks and Armenians emerged out of incidents like the 1915 relocation.

When the perceptions of South Caucasian students with regard to the education system in Turkey are examined, it is observed that three-quarters of these students had a will to study in Turkey. The underlying reasons for that will are the perceptions about the higher quality of education in Turkey and the feelings of curiosity, interest, and love towards Turkey and Turkish people. Those, who have some doubts with regard to studying in Turkey, arguing that the reason for this reluctance is their fear of separation from their families/country and the insufficiency of financial resources to meet education and living costs.

In terms of the bureaucratic procedures with regard to the educational processes of the South Caucasian students in Turkey, it can be argued that almost half of the students have somehow experienced a bureaucratic problem; however, this problem has soon been resolved. Approximately 10% of the students think that the educational bureaucracy in Turkey is tiresome, whereas 40% of the students think that everything went well with these bureaucratic procedures meaning that the content with regard to the educational bureaucracy is considerable.

In terms of the examination of the students' social life, it is observed that 65% of the students' state that they experience no difficulties with regard to establishing friendships. Most of these students are from Azerbaijan. Contrarily the ratio of experiencing difficulties with regard to establishing friendships is higher considering the Georgian and Armenian students. Almost 40% of the students, on the other hand, argue that they have somehow felt excluded by the Turkish students partially or totally. This shows that there are still serious problems with regard to Turkish students'

perceptions of foreign students. Considering the sexist approaches, almost 90% of the students argue that they have not felt any sexist approach towards themselves. When the social circle of the foreign students is examined, it is observed that the ratio of those students having only foreign friends is relatively high (36%) meaning that the foreign students have better communication among themselves. This data is also consistent with the data of the feeling of being excluded. Similarly, 40% of the students do not prefer to participate in any social activity in Turkey and 45% of them argue that they experience some difficulties in participating in social activities in Turkey because they are foreigners and people are distant to them. Almost half of the students argue that they have some problems with regard to alimentation, whereas again almost half of the students argue that they have difficulties with regard to customs and traditions in Turkey. These ratios can be considered quite high.

When the perceptions of South Caucasian students in Turkey before and after their arrival in this country are compared and contrasted, it can be said that there is generally a change in the negative direction. While almost half of the students had argued before their arrival in Turkey that they perceive Turkish culture as a closed culture to their own, this ratio fell to 32,6% after their experiences in Turkey. The figure below shows the changes in perceptions. The expressions in red show a negative change in perceptions, in other words, a decrease in the ratio of the answers of “I absolutely agree” and “I agree”, whereas the expressions in green show a positive change in perceptions, in other words, a decrease in the ratio of the answers of “I absolutely disagree” and “I disagree”. The figure shows that the students’ perceptions of Turkey have negatively changed in most of the fields stipulated below.

Such a negative change can also be observed for the idea of the students living in Turkey in the long term. Only one-quarter of the students have a positive attitude towards living in Turkey in the long term, whereas almost two-thirds of the students have some doubts about that. Still, two-thirds of the students advise other students to study and live in Turkey. Moreover, it is also observed that Azerbaijani students perceive their own culture closer to the Turkish culture and their will to live in Turkey in the long term is higher compared to the Georgian and Armenian students.

Therefore, alike the previous broader literature on the foreign students’ perceptions of Turkey, this research also suggests that the Southern Caucasian students studying in Turkey have encountered a variety of problems including for example the problems of adaptation, gender-based problems and alienation, specifically the Georgian and Armenian students. In addition, the findings of this research also supports the findings of the previous literature, which was mentioned in the literature review part of this article, that is; although foreign students came to Turkey with positive perceptions in mind, after they got to know Turkey more, their perceptions became more negative as they acquainted with Turkish culture more. Likewise, the findings of this research support the previous research regarding the reasons for demanding education in Turkey. So, alike these scholarly publications, the findings of this research suggest that students from Southern Caucasia have chosen to study in Turkey because of the higher quality of education in Turkish universities.

Nevertheless, when all these results are taken into consideration, it is important that the issues discussed below should be developed.

- The recognizability of Turkey in South Caucasian countries should be increased. It is quite conspicuous that almost 18% of the students have no idea about Turkey before their arrival in this country and a significant portion of these students are Georgian. It is very important for the Turkish universities to organize education fairs in South Caucasian countries with the support of the Turkish Foreign Ministry and the Turkish Higher Education Council in order to make them known to the South Caucasian students.

- It is very important to develop accommodation opportunities for the South Caucasian students living in Turkey. It would be convenient to increase the capacity of dormitories for these students. Moreover, the number and amount of scholarships to the students of the region should be increased in order to provide an opportunity for students with lower income rates.

- Since it is observed that a significant portion of the students have some problems in establishing friendships and socialization and have been feeling themselves partially or totally

excluded, some precautions should be taken to ameliorate this situation. The foreign students can be provided with more intensive orientation, more travels, excursions, social and cultural activities with Turkish students can be organized, more rehabilitation activities can be designed for decreasing the adaptation problems of the students and more counseling could be arranged for the foreign students. All these precautions would contribute to decrease the sense of exclusion and to increase socialization of the foreign students.

• It can also be said that the negative change in the perceptions of foreign students with regard to Turkey before and after their arrival in this country is related to the recent developments experienced in Turkish domestic and foreign policy. The development of Turkey's diplomatic, political, economic and socio-cultural relations with the regional countries would contribute to a positive change in the perceptions of South Caucasian students with regard to Turkey.

All in all, it should not be forgotten that these steps stipulated above for the amelioration of the foreign students' perception of Turkey and Turkish culture also contribute to the development of some deficiencies of the Turkish educational system as well as to the further integration of South Caucasian students. Such an amelioration would also enhance the soft power of Turkey vis-à-vis the South Caucasian countries.

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