Adjustment Challenges and Help Seeking Among Turkish International Students in the United States

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Abstract

The present qualitative inquiry examined adjustment challenges and help seeking among 15 Turkish international students (TIS) studying at various universities in the United States during their cross-cultural adjustment process. Data were gathered by means of semi-structured in-depth interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The results suggested that TIS experienced several adjustment challenges that affected their general well-being and satisfaction and made their adjustment process harder. According to the results, TIS initially sought help to overcome their adjustment challenges from family members, advisors, or friends. Dissatisfaction among TIS due to a lack of cultural sensitivity on the part of mental health providers negatively affected the students' help seeking from professional services. The findings of the present study may help mental health providers to address the needs of TIS effectively as a specific cultural group in multicultural settings in the United States.

Keywords: cross-cultural adjustment, help seeking, adjustment challenges, studying abroad, Turkish international students, qualitative study.

Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'ndeki Türk Uluslararası Öğrencilerin Uyum Zorlukları ve Yardim Arama Davranislari

Öz

Bu nitel araştırma, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'ndeki farklı üniversitelerden 15 Türk uluslararası öğrencinin uyum sürecinde yaşadıkları zorlukları ve yardım arayışını incelemiştir. Veriler yarı yapılandırılmış derinlemesine görüşmeler yoluyla toplanmış ve tematik analiz kullanılarak analiz edilmiştir. Sonuçlar, Türk uluslararası öğrencilerin genel iyi oluşlarını ve memnuniyetlerini etkileyen ve uyum sürecini zorlaştıran çeşitli uyum zorlukları yaşadıklarını gösterdi. Sonuçlara göre, Türk uluslararası öğrenciler uyum zorluklarının üstesinden gelmek için önce aile üyelerinden, danışmanlardan veya arkadaşlardan yardım istedi. Ruh sağlığı sağlayıcılarının kültürel duyarlılık eksikliğinden kaynaklanan Türk uluslararası öğrencilerin memnuniyetsizliği, onların profesyonel yardım aramalarını olumsuz etkilemiştir. Bu çalışmanın bulguları, ruh sağlığı sağlayıcılarının, Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nin çok kültürlü ortamlarında belirli bir kültürel grup olarak Türk uluslararası öğrencilerin ihtiyaçlarını etkili bir şekilde ele almasına yardımcı olabilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: kültürlerarası uyum, yardım arama, uyum zorlukları, yurtdışında eğitim, Türk uluslararası öğrenciler, nitel çalışma.

Introduction

Intercultural contact has expanded globally, and international students, whose numbers have risen significantly in recent decades, are among those most exposed to it. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS, n.d.), there are more than 5.3 million international students around the world, while in the 2019–2020 academic year, the United States was the most popular choice among international students as a destination for higher education (Statista, 2020). Among students wishing to study abroad, American universities are perceived as offering high-quality education and programs in various fields (Farrugia & Bhandari, 2014). Studying abroad offers these students numerous opportunities, while at the same time it results in profound life changes and challenges (Mesidor & Sly, 2016). Sudden life changes can be expected as a result of living in a new culture, and these changes can become stressors if the international students do not have the appropriate resources to cope with them (Arends-Toth & van de Vijver, 2006; Safdar et al., 2003).

Students experience a significant cross-cultural transition process in the destination country (Ward et al., 2001), and their ability to function effectively in the new society depends on their cultural adjustment. In this context, international students need to learn new social norms, new forms of relationship, and a new language in their new cultural environment (Doucerain, 2019). Cross-cultural adjustment experiences in new settings can therefore be stressful for international students and may result in distressing symptoms such as depression, homesickness, and isolation (Mori, 2000; Nilsson et al., 2004; Pedersen, 1991; Poyrazli & Mitchell, 2020). These symptoms may affect both the general well-being and the academic attainment of international students (Chiu, 1995; Poyrazli & Mitchell, 2020).

Although international students need psychological support to deal with the problems they face during their cross-cultural adjustment processes, the literature suggests that they underuse mental health services (Mori, 2000; Tung, 2011). According to Mori (2000), among the biggest obstacles preventing students from making use of mental health services are the students' cultural values and cultural perceptions with respect to mental health. The provision of culturally sensitive counseling services that take international students' different cultural values into account is therefore essential, particularly during the students' stressful process of adjustment to the host country. Cheng et al. (1993) also emphasize that research into the unique experiences of subcultures is an important way of identifying international students' different needs, challenges, and attitudes to help seeking that arise from their diverse cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, recognizing and responding to the needs of international students who come from different ethnic, racial, and national backgrounds is also a challenge for mental health providers in multicultural settings (Tatar & Horencyzk, 2000). To address international students' needs effectively, counselors must know and understand the students and must have specific knowledge of the students' subcultures and norms (Jacob & Greggo, 2011; Yoon & Portman, 2004).

In the present study, we selected Turkish international students (TIS) as the target population for investigation due to this group's specific cultural features and the growing number of TIS in the United States. According to the latest data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS, n.d.), there are more than 10,000 Turkish university students in the United States. Turkey is the only Muslim-majority country that has a secular constitution. While an active exchange between Eastern and Western values and attitudes contributes to the strengthening of individualism in Turkey, Turkish culture adamantly preserves its collectivist nature (Mocan-Aydin, 2000). An understanding of cross-cultural adjustment among TIS is essential, since the limited numbers of Turkish students compared to other groups of international students in the United States mean that access to social support from co-nationals during the process of adjustment to the United States is restricted (Duru & Poyrazli, 2007).

Bearing in mind the effects of the stressful adjustment process on international students, and the importance of cultural factors in the accurate identification of students' problems, a better understanding of the challenges facing TIS is essential in terms of the provision of counseling services. The objective of the present study was therefore to investigate challenges and help seeking among TIS in the United States during their adjustment process. The study addressed the following research questions:

1.What were the adjustment challenges that TIS faced in the United States?

2. How did TIS seek help to cope with adjustment challenges in the United States?

Literature Review

According to Ward et al. (2001), change and culture shock are likely to be experienced during stressful cross-cultural transition as part of the adjustment process. During this period, individuals may also experience sociocultural, psychological (i.e., in mental health status and behavior), biological, and physical changes (Berry, 1988). Due to the challenging nature of the change, the individual's mental health may be negatively affected (Berry, 1988). However, Zhou et al. (2008) emphasized that people in cultural transit are not victims of passive trauma stemming from a harmful event. In fact, they are active and responsive in solving the problems that emerge as a result of cultural transition (Zhou et al., 2008). Furthermore, Berry (2006) emphasized that an individual's resources can affect their perception of challenges during the adjustment process.

Studies have demonstrated that international students face many challenges, including social, cultural, psychological, and academic challenges. The available studies suggest that the adjustment challenges faced by TIS are similar to those faced by other international students. They include dealing with perceived discrimination (Duru & Poyrazli, 2011) and stereotypes (Burkholder, 2014); tackling language barriers (Burkholder, 2014; Duru & Poyrazli, 2007; Duru & Poyrazli 2011); overcoming academic difficulties (Kilinc & Granello, 2003); and experiencing homesickness (Kilinc & Granello, 2003).

Ward et al. (2001) emphasized how social support can reduce the stress generated by intercultural contact. Sources of social support include an individual's close networks, such as family and friends, or

professionals such as counselors and psychiatrists (Mojaverian et al., 2013). International students' help-seeking behavior may be directed toward either a formal source (e.g., professional mental health care service providers such as counselors) or an informal social support network (e.g., family members, friends, and academic advisors) (Tung, 2011), since individuals have different attitudes toward seeking help and accepting support according to their cultural differences (Ishii et al., 2017; Mojaverian et al., 2013; Shavitt et al., 2016). Bektas et al. (2009) stated that relationships with co-nationals are crucial for mental health, and that the social support that TIS receive from co-nationals during the process of adjustment to the United States is an important predictor of their successful psychological adjustment. Furthermore, the literature review showed that only one study, conducted by Kilinc and Granello (2003), focused on an examination of help-seeking attitudes among TIS. According to their findings, 33% of the TIS who participated in their study preferred to seek help from mental health services in the United States, while 50% preferred to turn to a friend as a source of psychological help. In addition, 59% of the participants stated that their source of information about mental illness was the media.

With respect to help seeking among Turks, the rule is that family members must support one another in a mutually beneficial manner (Sumer & Rasmussen, 2012). Individuals who are experiencing problems consult their families first (Imamoglu, 2003). Furthermore, Turks tend to regard the symptoms of psychological distress as akin to the symptoms of physical stress, such as headaches, heartburn, or shortness of breath, thus they seek help from physicians (Sumer & Rasmussen, 2012). Previous research has also shown that in Turkish culture (public, social networks, individuals), there is a certain stigma attached to mental illness and the use of professional mental health care services (Mocan-Aydin, 2000; Topkaya et al., 2017). Thus Turks tend not to seek help from counseling services out of a fear of being stigmatized (Topkaya et al., 2017). Furthermore, seeking help from an "outsider" would have to be a last resort for them (Sumer & Rasmussen, 2012). However, help seeking among TIS can be differentiated from that of Turks living in Turkey, since TIS are far from their families and friends, living in a new multicultural environment, and experiencing significant changes in their social networks. No less important is the fact that counseling services may be more easily accessible in the host country than they would be in Turkey.

In light of the reviewed literature, in order to address international students' needs effectively it is crucial to understand the impact and importance of cultural factors on their help-seeking behavior and on the adjustment challenges they experience. Every culture is unique, thus students' adjustment processes differ depending on the culture of origin and the host culture (Duru & Poyrazli, 2011). Mental health providers must therefore take cultural factors into consideration in order to understand and address the sociocultural adjustment challenges faced by international students. The aim of the present study was therefore to investigate adjustment challenges and help seeking among TIS in the United States.

Methodology

In order to examine adjustment challenges and help seeking among TIS during the process of adjustment in the United States, an inductive approach was adopted for qualitative data analysis, which was performed by means of in-depth semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis was chosen as the method of data analysis, as the focus of the study was on identifying themes from the perspective of participants' experiences in the United States.

Participants

Fifteen volunteer TIS were recruited for the study via social media groups, using the purposeful sampling technique (Etikan et al., 2016). The group of participants comprised eight females and seven males living in the United States. Participants' ages ranged from 21 to 36 years old, and they were studying for various academic degrees, including bachelor's (n = 4), master's (n = 6), and doctoral (n = 5) degrees from different universities in the United States. Turkish international students living in the United States for the purposes of higher education had been residing in the host country for between one and eight years.

Data Collection

The required ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the university to which the author is affiliated. Demographic information about the participants, including their arrival date in the host country and their age, educational background, language competency, and marital status were recorded in the basic datasheet. The semi-structured interview protocol was developed according to the literature on the cross-cultural adjustment process (e.g., Lee et al., 2004; Ting & Hwang, 2009; Ward et al., 2001). Each participant was sent an information sheet about the study and a consent form via email. Once the participants had consented to participate in the study, Skype interviews were conducted in Turkish or English, scheduled according to the participants' preference. Each interview lasted for between 45 and 70 minutes and was audio-recorded with the consent of the participant. The participants' names were kept anonymous. Numbers were assigned to the participants from 1 to 15, while the letter P was used to represent participants.

Data Analysis

Due to its theoretically flexible and detailed approach in terms of revealing patterns, the thematic analysis method proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used for the data analysis, since the focus of the present study was on identifying patterns within the experiences of TIS in the United States. Initially, the audio recordings were listened to without transcription and additional notes were made concerning the data. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines for thematic analysis, the transcripts and the interviewer's memos and notes were subsequently read repeatedly by members of the research team, allowing them to familiarize themselves with the data and identify clustered meanings and patterns appearing across the dataset. After gaining sufficient familiarity with the data, initial codes were created to represent the meanings and patterns they contained. The different codes were then characterized into potential themes

based on their similarities, resulting in a number of candidate themes. These themes were checked against the original dataset before being reviewed so as to reach a consensus about their definition and scope. Finally, the themes were reported, supported by direct quotes from the interviews.

Trustworthiness

To reinforce the validity of the study, various methods were applied to ensure its quality and trustworthiness. The first author took notes during the interviews in order to incorporate reflexivity regarding interviewee impressions, provide additional details, and interpret results on the basis of data analysis after each interview. This enabled the first author to remember the interview sessions more accurately and to retain thoughts regarding the participants' statements. By way of an external check, an academic with experience in qualitative research then coded the transcripts of three of the interviews and compared them with the coding performed by the authors. The comparison resulted in the emergence of common themes, enhancing the reliability of the study findings.

Findings

In this section, the results are structured according to two categories — adjustment challenges and help seeking — corresponding to the two research questions posed at the beginning of the present study.

Category 1: Adjustment Challenges Among TIS

The first category corresponds to the first research question: What were the adjustment challenges that TIS faced in the United States? It addresses the challenges of adjusting to the changes faced by TIS in the United States, and their experiences in their new lives. The results showed that these challenges negatively affected the overall satisfaction and well-being of TIS, largely due to the sociocultural differences between the host culture and the participants' home culture. Language issues, academic issues, cultural distance, discrimination, homesickness, loneliness, and financial issues were the major challenges identified by the participants as making their experience of adjustment harder than they had expected.

Theme 1: Language Issues

Participants stated that their main challenge was the language barrier, especially during their first year. It negatively affected them psychologically and in terms of their interpersonal relationships. For example, due to their limited vocabulary, they were unable to express themselves correctly and had difficulty understanding others and following their teachers in the educational setting, especially in the initial transition period. Participants also reported that these challenges caused them to feel isolated, stressed, and insecure. As P7 explained: "Mostly, during the first semester, I felt really weird, stressed, and alien because I could not understand what people were talking about. I could not follow and answer them correctly due to my limited vocabulary. So I was silent." Furthermore, P15 stated: "The language barrier prevents deep relationships with local people. Because I cannot express myself fully, and I cannot joke, or we cannot

understand each other sometimes. Thus, mutual satisfaction is not as desired, and relationships do not deepen."

Theme 2: Academic Issues

Participants reported that academic competition, fear of failure, unfamiliarity with the American education system, and excessive amounts of homework caused them to feel stressed, anxious, and hopeless. This situation not only affected them psychologically but also affected their physical health. For example, P5 stated:

> The education system is utterly different than Turkey. I study hard and have a sleeping problem because of academic stress. There is no memorization system like in Turkey. In other words, it is not possible to be successful by memorizing the subjects a few days before the exam, because here we are asked not to memorize, that is, to repeat what we have learned, but to produce solutions and come up with new ideas. Therefore, I have to work for hours every day, understand the subjects and learn very well. The fear of failing as well as studying hard in this challenging education system is very stressful, and I could not find any solution to deal with it.

Theme 3: Cultural Distance

Participants reported that they perceived the many cultural differences between Turkey and the United States as sources of stress and needed a long time to learn about American norms. For example, P1 reported: "American culture is very different—food, hospitality, social norms, etc. For example, kissing a friend of the same sex is usual in Turkey, a sign of homosexuality in the United States. We learned the differences over time by living."

Participants also reported cultural differences in relationships. They described Americans as individualistic people who maintain a greater distance in their interpersonal relationships. According to the findings, this greater personal distance caused TIS to feel lonely, dissatisfied, and homesick. In the words of P9: "When I share a problem, Americans do not care and do not want to listen. Also, I wonder something about them but cannot ask. Unlike us, Americans are distanced, superficial, and do not like sincerity." In addition, according to the participants the absence of neighborly relations in the United States made them feel lonely, anxious, and isolated. For example, P15 explained: "Americans are individualistic. I do not even know my neighbors here. We just say hello and pass when we meet. This is so strange. If I die at home, my neighbors would not even notice."

Theme 4: Discrimination

Participants reported being exposed to at least one incident of discrimination that caused them to feel anger. For example, P1 reported:

> I was not accepted to the internship position at a company due to being an international student. Also, there is a professor in our department who only accepts American students as doctoral assistants. I think these are a kind of discrimination.

Theme 5: Misperception about Turks

Participants reported that some Americans had misconceptions about Turks and Turkey. Some participants experienced hostile reactions after the September 11 attack, mainly because of the Muslim majority in Turkey. They described feeling marginalized, humiliated, and disappointed. For example, P6 explained:

> Many Americans think that Turkey is an Arab state because, in their eyes, Islam and Arabs are identical. The fact that most Turkish people are Muslims causes this misperception. Some people ask questions such as do you ride camels, is not it challenging to live by the rules of shariah, how many wives will your husband have when you get married? They do not know that Turkey is a secular and democratic country and not everyone is Muslim. As a Turkish woman wearing a headscarf, I am often mistaken as an Arab by others. Also, I was insulted as an Islamic terrorist a few times after 9/11. These attitudes make me feel nervous and anxious."

Theme 6: Homesickness

Participants reported that being away from their families made them feel homesick. Especially during their first year, not being able to find the same kind of comfort in their new context as they experienced at home, or experiencing problems or intense academic stress, triggered homesickness among TIS. They stated that when they felt homesick, it was accompanied by feelings of depression and anxiety. For example, P13 stated: "I rarely was deeply homesick in my first year. I was alone and felt that I am not belong to anywhere. I was asking myself what I am doing here, where my home is." Also, P4 noted: "My classes are very difficult and when I have difficulties I feel homesick and want to be in Turkey."

Theme 7: Loneliness

Participants reported that while they shared responsibilities with their families in Turkey, having to take full responsibility for their lives on their own and being unable to find the intimacy they had expected in their friendships due to cultural differences made them feel lonely. This situation caused participants to experience emotional stress. As P8 reported: "I feel basically, alone. I have to do everything by myself. Definitely this is normal that I have to control my life myself, but sometimes I do not want to do everything alone."

Theme 8: Financial Issues

Participants reported that the devaluation of the Turkish lira against the dollar caused financial difficulties, which they experienced with greater intensity every passing day. The situation resulted in emotional pressure and stress and also restricted the participants' social lives. For example, P2 reported: "Turkish currency is decreasing rapidly and it cannot compare with the U.S. dollar. That makes me so stressful. I have to work to manage my life."

Overall, the findings showed that TIS faced many different challenges in their academic and social lives in the United States. These challenges made their cross-cultural adjustment harder and negatively affected their overall satisfaction and well-being.

Category 2: Help Seeking Among TIS

The second category corresponds to the second research question: How did TIS seek help to cope with the challenges of adjustment to the United States? According to the participants, their help seeking had an impact on their overall satisfaction and well-being as a buffer against the sociocultural challenges of adjustment. Depending on the types of challenges faced during their adjustment process, TIS sought help from different sources. Two themes emerged in this category: help seeking from informal sources and formal sources.

Theme 1: Help Seeking From Informal Sources

The results showed that when dealing with sociocultural adjustment challenges in the United States, TIS preferred to seek help primarily from family members, peers, or advisors with whom they had a close relationship. Participants described having relationships with individuals from different groups, including locals, co-nationals, and other internationals.

Participants reported that their families were their main source of emotional help in overcoming the challenges they faced in the host country. This was because of their strong family bonds, the nature of Turkish culture, and the sense of trust and understanding within their families. As P3 stated:

> If I have a problem or am unhappy here, I call my family. Time-zone difference restrict our relationships, but I get all kinds of support, and they motivate me because they know me best. Family is everything.

Moreover, the data analysis showed that most of the participants' best friends were Turkish, and they sought emotional help from each other. In this respect, the behavior of TIS was determined by their common language and culture, similar experiences in the host country, sincerity, a feeling of intimacy due to relatively small personal space, a sense of being understood, and mutual trust. For example, P14 reported:

> I made two close Turkish friends with whom we help each other in difficult times. They understand me due to the same cultural background and speaking Turkish. We hug each other, touch or open ourselves without hesitation or even swear and cry when we are angry or happy. No one misunderstands anyone, but this is impossible with others. Unlike us, Americans and most internationals are distanced, superficial, and do not like intimacy and sincerity due to their high personal space.

Additionally, participants stated that they had to deal with serious academic stress and initially received academic support from their American and other international friends. For example, P6 stated: "For the first time in my life, I faced the feeling of academic failure. This feeling was very heavy. Fortunately, my Indian and American friends helped and motivated me. Then, I overcame with it." In addition, P10 reported:

> Language, system, relations are different and stressful here. In this sense, we are in solidarity with other foreign students because we experience the same things. So, we understand and help each other. Otherwise, it is impossible to be successful alone.

Furthermore, participants reported experiencing daily hassles and receiving practical support from experienced TIS and American friends. Participants also reported that they had positive relations with their advisors, who supported them on and off campus. In the words of P9: "I prefer my experienced friends

[Turks] due to our practical thinking, or Americans who know the United States best, especially my advisor. We have a supportive and good relationship off campus as well."

Theme 2: Help Seeking From Formal Sources

This theme refers to the extent to which students benefited from counseling services that provided professional support in coping with the challenges they faced during the adjustment process. This theme also addressed the perceptions they developed about counseling services in the United States.

Participants were adequately informed about the counseling services by their respective colleges, and their advisors directed them to counseling services when needed. In the words of P5:

> Counseling service is a part of academic life here. We are informed about it by email often, and advisors direct the students in need. There was a course on "Adaptation to American Culture" in my first year. I learned a lot about the adaptation process, and how to deal with stressors. This course and my advisor's support made me feel relaxed and comfortable about living in the United States.

Furthermore, participants living in the United States who received academic help from the school counseling services were satisfied with the support they were given. For example, P12 reported: "I applied to the counseling service for academic issues such as motivation and preparing a study plan. Counselors helped me. It was a nice motivation."

Participants living in the United States who sought help from college counseling services for challenges other than academic challenges reported that they did not continue with the consultations because they felt that the counselors ignored their cultural norms and failed to understand them. The participants were not satisfied. As P11 noted: "Once, I applied to the counselor, but our mindset is different. The counselor did not understand me and my cultural norms. Actually, it was ineffective. It is good only for simple academic stuff, not more." Moreover, participants who sought help from off-campus health care services also stated that they were not satisfied because the mental health provider did not understand them due to their cultural background. In this regard, P10 reported:

> Adaptation was very hard. The university counselor referred me to a behavioral healthcare center. I met with the psychiatrist monthly for prescribing medication and with the psychologist biweekly. The psychologist never caught my perspective due to cultural differences. She was looking blankly at my face most of the time.

The effect of stigma on participants' utilization of counseling services was also examined, and none of the participants reported any stigma-related concern. In fact, the results showed that TIS in the United States saw college counseling services as a part of academic life; however, for them, it was cultural insensitivity on the part of the counselors rather than academic issues per se that caused their dissatisfaction with the counseling services.

Discussion and Implications

The aim of the present study was to obtain an in-depth understanding of challenges and help seeking among TIS studying in the United States during the adjustment process. According to the findings, TIS faced many challenges while living in the United States, including language issues and discrimination. To

cope with these challenges, they sought help from different groups of individuals, depending on the situation. The findings showed that TIS turned first to their families for help and support. Help seeking from professionals was determined by the participants' perceptions of counseling services and the cultural sensitivity of the mental health providers.

Participants faced various challenges during the cross-cultural adjustment process in the United States. The findings of the present study include problems experienced by TIS that are consistent with previous studies on adjustment and acculturation among TIS in the United States (Burkholder, 2014; Duru & Poyrazli, 2007; Duru & Poyrazli 2011; Kilinc & Granello, 2003). Mori (2000) stated that the language barrier is the most common cause of stress among international students during the adjustment process. Also, Duru and Poyrazli (2007; 2011) stated that a high level of English language proficiency reduces acculturative stress among TIS and facilitates the adjustment process. Consistent with these findings, the results of the present study showed that the language barrier was an important factor in terms of both satisfaction in social life and academic achievement among TIS. Inability to express themselves fully and to understand their friends due to the language barrier hindered TIS from achieving satisfaction in their relationships. In addition, students may have experienced difficulties in understanding their teachers and actively participating in classes due to the language barrier.

In terms of their academic lives, TIS experienced intense stress due to their unfamiliarity with the education system. Academic difficulties negatively affected the students' general well-being and resulted in restrictions in their social lives. Misra et al. (2003) stated that international students who experience academic stress react more intensely to other stressors in the adjustment process. Similarly, the results of the present study showed that TIS experienced greater homesickness, especially during exam periods, due to academic stress, making the adjustment process harder.

The results also demonstrated the impacts of Turkish culture on the cross-cultural adjustment of TIS who participated in the study. Participants living in the United States perceived a significant cultural distance between Turkish and American culture. This cultural difference was felt most keenly with respect to relationships, because even though Turkey is a country that embodies both collectivist and individualist values, its collectivistic nature is preserved in terms of relationships (Mocan-Aydin, 2000). This meant that TIS perceived cultural differences, including personal distance in relationships, as a challenge in their adjustment process. The perception of cultural distance caused TIS to feel lonely, homesick, and isolated, thus negatively affecting both their psychological and sociocultural adjustment.

Moreover, the present study showed that TIS faced challenges due to the negative political discourse about Muslims in the United States caused stress and anxiety among TIS. In particular, Muslim women who were visible because of wearing a headscarf experienced verbal attacks and discrimination. This finding was consistent with earlier findings by Kilinc and Granello (2003), who emphasized that more religious TIS

were more dissatisfied and less acculturated. In other words, challenges based on political issues in the United States hindered the adjustment process among TIS.

Similar to the findings of previous studies on help seeking among Turkish students in Turkey and the United States, in the present study TIS turned first to their families for emotional help, as a culture-based attitude. Imamoglu (2003) described how Turkish culture is family centered and how close family members are the main sources of advice when addressing personal problems. Moreover, this is consistent with the finding by Burkholder (2014), who reported how TIS emphasized that their best friends were Turkish due to shared language, familiarity, and cultural background. The results of the present study were also consistent with the finding of Bektas et al. (2009), who mentioned the importance of support from co-nationals in the adjustment process among TIS in the United States.

Participants highlighted intimacy and sincerity in relationships with co-nationals as determinants for seeking emotional help from them to cope with negative feelings such as loneliness in the host country. As pointed out by Adams and Plaut (2003), the meaning of friendship varies from culture to culture. Mocan-Aydin (2000) described how Turkish culture emphasizes friendship and sharing as a feature of its collectivistic nature. Same-sex hugging, kissing, or touching are rituals among Turks, expressing love, acceptance, and understanding (Mocan-Aydin, 2000). Besides, hugging close friends is a sign of solidarity among Turkish people, and Turks who regard hugging as normal tend to perceive more reserved people as being cold (Cetin et al., 2017). Sincerity and intimacy are therefore crucial factors in terms of emotional help seeking among TIS who are accustomed to Turkish norms and collectivistic relationships.

All the participants living in the United States reported that they had learnt about their respective college counseling services from official sources. They had been informed by an email from the college and by their advisors, and, if necessary, they had even been directed to the counseling services by their advisors. Frequent exposure to such information via different channels positively affected these participants' attitudes and behavior toward the counseling services. Participants considered college counseling services as part of their academic life and sought help from the college counseling services to deal with their academic challenges. They also emphasized that they were, by and large, satisfied with these services.

At the same time, some of the TIS participants in the United States who applied to the counseling services to deal with challenges other than academic issues were not satisfied, because they felt that they were not understood by the counselors, who were unaware of their cultural norms and values. The counselors' cultural insensitivity negatively affected the participants' approach to the counseling services. Notably, the American Counseling Association (2014) emphasized that "multicultural counseling competency is required across all counseling specialties, counselors [should] gain knowledge, personal awareness, sensitivity, dispositions, and skills pertinent to being a culturally competent counselor in working with a diverse client population" (American Counseling Association, 2014, p. 8). In multicultural settings, counselors must have the qualities specified by the American Counseling Association so that, at the very

least, they can make a general cultural assessment of their clients. An overall cultural assessment is only possible with an understanding of the client's cultural framework, their identity, the cultural explanations behind their help seeking, and the cultural elements within the counselor–client relationship (Kress et al., 2010).

Limitations and Future Directions for Research

The present study had certain limitations due to the nature of the qualitative research. Our findings are based on the responses of 15 participants and should therefore be interpreted within the context of the present study. However, the study is important in terms of paving the way for researchers to conduct future studies on cross-cultural adjustment and coping strategies among TIS using various methodologies in different contexts. It is clear that many more studies are needed to compare and contrast our results using different methodological approaches such as mixed method research.

Author Contributions

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors have reported no potential conflict of interest.

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