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### SOCIO-CULTURAL ADAPTATION AND FUTURE EXPECTATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: THE CASE OF KÜTAHYA DUMLUPINAR UNIVERSITY

#### ULUSLARARASI ÖĞRENCİLERİN SOSYOKÜLTÜREL UYUMU VE GELECEK HEDEFLERİ: KÜTAHYA DUMLUPINAR ÜNİVERSİTESİ ÖRNEĞİ

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#### ABSTRACT

In line with the goal of internationalization in education, one of the important strategies of Turkish universities is to become a center of attraction for international students. With the initiatives taken in this direction, Turkey has recently been hosting an increasing number of international students from many different countries. The number of international students studying at Kütahya Dumlupınar University is also increasing day by day. For this reason, it is extremely important to understand the educational and social adaptation of international students to identify the problems they experience, if any, and to lay the groundwork for the steps to be taken to find solutions to the problems. The aim of this study is to understand the educational and social adaptation levels and future goals of international students studying at Kütahya Dumlupınar University. For this purpose, the educational experiences of international students, their relations with the university and the city, their perceptions of Turkey and the country of origin, and their future expectations are revealed. Within the scope of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 international students studying at Kütahya Dumlupınar University. Based on the data, 7 themes were obtained: (1) The reason for choosing Turkey, (2) The reason for choosing the university, (3) Sociocultural adaptation, (4) Educational situation, (5) Views about the university, (6) Views about the city, (7) Future expectations.

**Key Words:** *International Students, Educational Adaptation, Sociocultural Adaptation, Kütahya Dumlupınar University*

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## ÖZ

Türkiye'deki üniversitelerin, eğitimde uluslararasılaşma hedefi doğrultusundaki önemli stratejilerden biri, uluslararası öğrenciler için bir çekim merkezi haline gelmesidir. Bu yönde yapılan girişimlerle Türkiye son zamanlarda çok farklı ülkelerden gelen ve sayıları gittikçe artan uluslararası öğrenciye ev sahipliği yapmaktadır. Kütahya Dumlupınar Üniversitesi'nde öğrenim gören uluslararası öğrenci sayısı da gün geçtikçe artmaktadır. Bu nedenle, uluslararası öğrencilerin eğitim ve sosyal uyumlarının anlaşılması, varsa yaşadıkları sorunların tespit edilmesi ve bu sayede sorunlara çözüm önerisi oluşturma yolunda atılacak adımlara bir zemin hazırlanması son derece önemlidir. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Kütahya Dumlupınar Üniversitesi'nde eğitim gören uluslararası öğrencilerin eğitim ve sosyal uyum durumunun ve gelecek hedeflerinin anlaşılmasıdır. Bu amaçla çalışmada, uluslararası öğrencilerin eğitim deneyimleri, üniversite ve şehir ile kurdukları ilişkiler, Türkiye ve köken ülkeye ilişkin algıları ve gelecek yönelimleri ortaya konulmuştur. Çalışma kapsamında, Kütahya Dumlupınar Üniversitesi'ndeki öğrenim gören 21 uluslararası öğrenci ile yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme gerçekleştirilmiştir. Verilerden hareketle 7 tema elde edilmiştir: (1) Türkiye'yi tercih nedeni, (2) Üniversiteyi tercih nedeni, (3) Sosyokültürel uyum, (4) Eğitim durumları, (5) Üniversiteye ilişkin görüşler, (6) Kente ilişkin görüşler, (7) Gelecek hedefleri.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Uluslararası Öğrenciler, Eğitim Uyumu, Sosyokültürel Uyum, Kütahya Dumlupınar Üniversitesi*

## Introduction

In line with the goals of internationalization in education in Turkey, the number of international students studying at universities is increasing day by day. According to the data of YÖK (2023), there are 301.694 international students in Turkey for the academic year 2022-2023. In the USA, France, and some other European countries, where the experience of international student mobility goes back much further, many studies have been conducted on the adaptation of international students to the country of study. These studies are important for countries and institutions aiming to become a center of attraction for international students. Determining the factors that are important in the social and academic adaptation of students through these studies is also very important in terms of understanding the problems in this direction.

There are many factors affecting the adaptation and future expectations of international students. Therefore, investigating the adaptation of students to their new environments requires a two-way perspective. The first one is the social adaptation of students, which refers to their participation in the city life, social interaction, and intra-university relations (relations with students, faculty members and bureaucratic structure), and the other one is to address academic achievement and the relationship with academic culture. In this context, three indicators can be identified for students' social adaptation: indicators related to the structural dimension (number of student networks, sociodemographic characteristics, gender distribution, age distribution), indicators related to the functional dimension (behaviors within the network, study activities within the group and out-group personal development activities not directly linked to school work) and indicators related to the subjective dimension (student satisfaction with the quality of the network to which they belong) (Berthaud, 2017: 65-67). Thus, the main questions to be investigated regarding students' social adaptation are as follows: Is the university a socializing place

for international students? What are the socialization areas outside the university? What are the socialization problems within the university and the classroom (student-student and student-faculty relations)? It is possible to evaluate the studies on international students in a wide range. The aim of this study is to reveal the adaptation situation and the problems of international students studying at Kütahya Dumlupınar University, an institution that has significantly increased the number of international students, in their educational and social life, and the future expectations of the students. For this purpose, firstly, the problems experienced by international students in their educational adaptation and the bond established with the university and the city, which is an important part of the social adaptation process, were examined and the demands of the students were revealed. In addition, by revealing the future expectations of international students, the bond established with both the country of origin and Turkey is discussed.

### **Literature Review on International Students**

In the international literature, one of the most important indicators of international students' educational adaptation is their academic achievement. For this reason, studies on the educational adaptation of students mostly focus on their educational achievement. The fact that the educational achievement of international students is low compared to the general level makes it necessary to examine the factors affecting this. In the literature, the factors that negatively affect educational achievement can generally be categorized under the following headings: language, academic system differences, student-teacher relationship, social context, inter-student relations (relations with local students), learning style and cultural context differences (The National Education Association). Martins (1974: 19), in his field study on the integration of international students in France in 1970 and 1974, revealed that school achievement is closely related to the social environment at school and emphasized that students who actively participate in activities away from social isolation comprehend learning methods and norms more easily. Another important factor that strengthens school adaptation is the similarity between the education received in the country of origin and the education in the host country. As the difference between the educational structure of the two countries increases, school adaptation becomes more difficult. In Ali's (1982) study, it was stated that the pedagogical culture and school habitus of international students are effective in their interactions in the classroom and in their relationship with the teacher. The same emphasis is also found in Patel's (1975: 30) study. In his study on Indian students in France, he reveals that international students who come to a country with a very different education system experience problems especially in relationships and practices within the university. In another study on the academic achievement of international students at İnönü University (Şahin & Demirtaş, 2014: 98), it was stated that the average of the General Weighted Grade Point Average (GPA) of international students was low, and the most important reasons for this were the language problem, untreated subjects that they did not see before coming to the university, and discrimination by the professors. Perceived discrimination among international students is also one of the factors of acculturation stress (Torun & Bozkurt, 2019: 415). Acculturation stress refers to the psychological and physical discomfort experienced by the individual because of adaptation to the new cultural environment (Torun & Bozkurt, 2019: 409).

Cultural dimension is an important factor to be taken into consideration in the adaptation of international students. Chevrollet (1977) found that students' adaptation level to

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university is affected by the cultural difference between the country of origin and the host country. Students who have experienced a significant break in the pedagogical context experience the effect of this and this difference can be revealed based on research on international students from different countries of origin (Tagawa, 2005). The educational culture at the university also affects international students' participation in classes, their attempts to ask questions, and their relationship with the teacher. The university culture in the country of origin and the culture in the country of origin do not have the same behavioral norms. When language problems are added to this situation, the communication with the teacher is also significantly affected. Therefore, language is a determining factor for students (Tagawa, 2005: 132). Teachers also play an important role in students' educational adaptation. According to Lawrence (2001), despite an increasingly diverse student population, academics still teach 'elite' rather than 'real'; they limit themselves to 'pure' teaching rather than a 'value-added' teaching style that supports students in the learning process (Lawrence, 2001: 4). One of the important points in this context is to analyze the cultural issues underlying the higher education academic skills of international students and to formulate recommendations for 'value-added' pedagogical strategies for the development of intercultural competences essential for success in higher education (Carroll & Ryan, 2007).

In addition to the factors affecting the educational success of international students, the relationships they establish with the university and the city are also important for understanding their educational adaptation in a holistic perspective. In the resettlement movement of individuals who migrate for the purpose of education, partly personal motivations and partly structural factors play a role. International students leave their country of origin and come to a country with a different education system, administrative system, cultural and social environment. Although the degree of this difference varies from country to country, there is a break in their life cycle for international students. This break brings along problems of adaptation to the new cultural and educational environment. However, international students have the potential to be an important actor of transformation both in Turkey and in the countries of origin in terms of their future expectations. Therefore, international students are also analyzed in terms of their perceptions of Turkey and soft power in the field of education.

Studies on international students in Turkey have mostly addressed the integration problems of international students. In this context, the most emphasized problem is the language problem (Zavalsız & Gündag, 2017: 3174; Şahin & Demirtaş, 2014; Sungur et al., 2016; Musaoğlu, 2016: 19; Türk, Topçu & Yaşar, 2018: 1860; Başaran Alagöz & Geçkil, 2017: 284; Ünal, 2017: 240). International students who have difficulty in using Turkish face problems in establishing direct friendships and creating a social environment for themselves. This situation causes international students to be friends with other students who speak the same language and their communication with Turkish students remains limited. International students prefer their friends to be of the same ethnicity and culture (Güllü, 2010: 219; Yardımcıoğlu, Beşel & Savaşan, 2017: 233; Ünal, 2017: 252). Their language difficulties also create significant difficulties in understanding the course and in daily life (Zavalsız & Gündag, 2017: 3182; Yardımcıoğlu, Beşel & Savaşan, 2017: 239). Especially in verbal courses, international students have expressed that they had great difficulty (Başaran Alagöz & Geçkil, 2017: 284). Students also stated that they had difficulties in written exams due to language problems (Yardımcıoğlu, Beşel & Savaşan, 2017: 240). Language deficiency constitutes an important obstacle in communicating

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with the lecturer and participating in the course. Not knowing the language of the country, they are studying sufficiently is also a source of acculturation stress for students (Torun & Bozkurt, 2019: 407).

Another problem that students encounter in social adaptation processes is the difficulties arising from cultural differences (Türk, Topçu & Yaşar, 2018: 1860). Dressing difficulties for students with local clothing styles and differences in food cultures can be counted among these (Zavalsız & Gündoğ, 2017; Kıroğlu, Kesten & Elma, 2010; Musaoğlu, 2016: 19; Yardımcıoğlu, Beşel & Savaşan, 2017: 235). The relationships that students establish with the city they live in also have an important place in their social adaptation. In this relationship, the characteristics of the city of origin play an important role. While a medium-sized city is considered small and inadequate for students who previously lived in a larger city, students from a smaller settlement like the city (Zavalsız & Gündoğ, 2017: 3185).

Students face some difficulties in the cities where they live. These are factors such as transportation problems, high cost, accommodation problems, lack of social activities, inadequate social facilities, negative view of students, insufficient parks and playgrounds (Şahin & Demirtaş, 2014: 107; Yardımcıoğlu, Beşel & Savaşan, 2017: 241). Other difficulties experienced in adaptation to social life are the problems of housing, residence, and benefiting from health services (Başaran Alagöz & Geçkil, 2017: 284; Yardımcıoğlu, Beşel & Savaşan, 2017: 234).

The most important actors in the educational adaptation of international students are students and lecturers. In-class communication can be ensured through both the relationships they establish with Turkish students and the interaction with the lecturer. In this context, international students have certain expectations from Turkish students. Turkish students are expected not to exclude themselves, be respectful and help them overcome some difficulties, and this support significantly affects the success of international students (Zavalsız & Gündoğ, 2017: 3188; Bayramdurdyeva, 2019: 517). It is important that the way the lecturer conducts the course facilitates international students' understanding of the lessons and makes them active. In this context, adapting intercultural communication with international students to new conditions is an important element of educational activity. Therefore, it is important that the behavior and attitude of the lecturer should be in a way to take into account cultural differences. The intercultural communication skills of faculty members have a significant impact on the social adaptation of international students who are in the first stage of their acquaintance with the country (Latipov, Ziyatdinov, Demidova, Gerasimov & Zaostrovstseva, 2017). In the field study (Şahin & Demirtaş, 2014: 100), good communication with the lecturer is one of the main suggestions that students offer about the lecturers in order to increase their academic success levels.

There are studies on the reasons why international students prefer Turkey and their future expectations. In these studies, the most important reasons for preferring Turkey are that Turkey is a good education center and an Islamic country, that they have enough points, that they think they will receive a good education, and that they have positive feelings about Turkey (Yıldıran, Özkan & Büyükyılmaz, 2016; Şahin & Demirtaş, 2014; Türk, Topçu & Yaşar, 2018; Yardımcıoğlu, Beşel & Savaşan, 2017: 231). The Turkish TV series and film sector also plays a very important role in their preference for Turkey (Türk, Topçu & Yaşar, 2018). According to the findings of the studies, a significant number of

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international students want to continue living in Turkey after their education (Yıldırım, Özkan & Büyükyılmaz, 2016: 27; Türk, Topçu & Yaşar, 2018: 1856). International students' views on Turkey also provide important clues in terms of its soft power potential. In a study on international students at Gazi University (Türk, Topçu & Yaşar, 2018: 1859,1861), 37.2% of international students stated that if there was only one superpower in the world, they would like it to be Turkey, and 53.5% stated that Turkey could be a model of progress for their countries.

In line with the findings in the national and international literature, international students' adaptation problems can be evaluated from many different perspectives. Such studies are also important in terms of developing innovative approaches at the institutional level in the era of internationalization.

## **Method**

The aim of this study is to reveal the current situation, problems, and future expectations regarding the educational and social adaptation of international students at Kütahya Dumlupınar University. In this context, it is aimed to reveal the social, cultural, and educational experiences of international students, their perceptions of Turkey and Kütahya in particular, the bond they have established with Turkey and Kütahya, the problems they face and their future expectations. The study is based on the qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with international students at Kütahya Dumlupınar University. Semi-structured interviews are a problem-centred interview technique, and the researcher knows which phases will be followed throughout the interview, but the participant is left free to give answers during the interview (Mayring, 2011: 75). Qualitative research aims to collect in-depth information on a subject. In this research, capturing diversity is at the forefront. The aim is not to interview a large number of participants, but to provide data richness through participants of different qualifications. In the research, the sample was formed through purposive and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling aims to conduct research on individuals and groups selected based on a specific criterion or characteristic and aims at an approach that includes different qualities of the universe based on a small sample (Kümbetoğlu, 2017: 99). While selecting the participants, gender, country of origin, university year, and departments of education were taken into consideration in order to achieve diversity. Interviews were conducted between June 2020 and March 2021. Due to the difficulty in finding participants due to the pandemic, the snowball sampling technique was functional in reaching other students through the students reached. Most of the interviews were conducted online with students from different countries due to the pandemic. The interviews were video recorded with the permission of the participants and the interviews were transcribed into written text. Interviews were conducted in Turkish with students who had reached the level of expressing themselves in Turkish. Therefore, international students receiving language education at TÖMER were not included in the study. The interview form was used in order to keep the researcher within the boundaries of the research topic. At the same time, ethics committee approval was obtained to conduct the study. Within the scope of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 international students from different countries at Kütahya Dumlupınar University. Qualitative data were obtained at the end of the interviews. Qualitative data do not have a feature that is expected to give a numerical result, but are singular and subjective experiences that include opinions, perceptions, and emotions (Kümbetoğlu, 2017: 44). For this purpose, the raw data

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obtained after the audio recording analyses were first coded according to the themes and categories created by the researchers in MAXQDA, qualitative data analysis program, the coding made to reduce the margin of error were checked again and the data were subjected to descriptive analysis. The data were coded by creating themes and categories in the light of the literature. In descriptive analysis, a descriptive analysis based on the narratives of individuals was carried out by quoting what they said in the interviews (Kümbetoğlu, 2017: 154).

## **Findings**

Within the scope of the study, 7 themes were obtained: (1) Reasons for choosing Turkey, (2) Reasons for choosing the university, (3) Sociocultural adaptation, (4) Educational situation, (5) Views on the university, (6) Views on the city, (7) Future expectations.

## **Sociodemographic Characteristics of Students**

The international students interviewed in the study were categorized as gender, age, country of origin, department, and class in terms of sociodemographic characteristics. A total of 21 international students, 17 male and 4 female, were interviewed. The age of the interviewed students is between 18 and 35 years old. When the countries of origin are analyzed, students from Syria (n=6) come first, followed by Somalia (n=4), Azerbaijan (n=3) and Arabia (n=3). In total, there are participants from 9 different countries. In terms of the departments in which they are studying, there are participants studying in 13 different departments in total, with Business Administration (n=4), Political Science and International Relations (n=4) in the first place. Although the distribution of the departments of the participants varies between the departments within the Faculty of Arts and Sciences and the Faculty of Engineering, the highest number of participants are in the Department of Political Science and International Relations. A significant number of the participants are 1st year students (n=12). Apart from this, there are also associate degree, 2nd year, 3rd year, 4th year, master's and doctoral students.

## **Reasons for Choosing Turkey**

The reasons for the participants' preference for Turkey are shaped around six themes. These themes are rational conditions, cultural affinity, quality of education, necessity, friends/relatives and religious affinity. In terms of the frequencies of the codes, the most common code is rational conditions (n=11). Rational conditions include the cost of studying in another country, the ease of living in Turkey, and the lack of other available country options.

*"According to my opportunities, if I were the child of a high-level family, I would not be here, but somewhere else, in Istanbul, for example, in Europe" (P4, Azerbaijan).*

*"We go to Egypt for holidays, but it is very difficult to live there. It is very difficult for us because we have never lived there, so we prefer Turkey". (P9, Arabia).*

In the category of cultural proximity, it is seen that religion, language and culture constitute a common denominator for students to choose Turkey. Turkey's recognition in foreign countries, geographical proximity, common religion, and culture are important reasons for preference.

*"Because Muslims love us very much, they help us a lot, that's why I chose Turkey." (P12, Somalia).*

*"Anyway, before I came here, there were TV series in Azerbaijan." (P17, Azerbaijan).*

*"It is close to our culture and Islam. People are closer to us. For example, if we think about Germany, I don't like it at all." (P6, Syria).*

*"If I had a choice, I would choose Turkey because Turkey was our neighboring country, and our culture was very close. Therefore, Turkey is very important for us, and we feel very close" (P19, Iraq).*

The quality of education in Turkey is another reason for choosing Turkey. The quality of education in Turkey includes the innovative nature of education, the existence of rules and order, following the developments in the field of education, the fact that education is much more institutionalized compared to the country of origin, and the quality of the teaching of the courses. However, the fact that the language of education is not English causes students to prefer other countries. One of the main reasons for coming to Turkey compulsorily is the war environment in their countries of origin. This is especially the case for students from Syria.

The presence of friends and relatives in Turkey is an important reason for students to choose Turkey. The fact that their close relatives or friends previously studied in Turkey and provided positive feedback about the education system in Turkey creates a potential international student mobility. The circle of friends and relatives was identified as one of the determining themes affecting student mobilization at all levels.

*"My friends were very satisfied with Turkey. They were very satisfied with the university and the courses offered. I also made an effort to come to Turkey and I was very excited. Now I am here." (P7, Somalia).*

*Finally, sharing a common religion is among the reasons why international students prefer Turkey for education. Religious affinity also creates a sense of common sharing intertwined with culture.*

*"My father preferred Turkey because it is a Muslim country, and it is closer in terms of religion" (P11, Arabia).*

Migration networks are interpersonal ties, such as friendship, that connect the migrant in the destination country with the non-migrant in the country of origin (Massey, 1988). These networks function to reduce the social, emotional and economic costs of migration and ensure the continuity of a potential wave of students. Thus, as a meso-level factor, these migration networks form the basis of student flows by influencing the choice of destination country through interpersonal ties and connections, such as friendship or members of the community of origin.

### **Reasons for Choosing the University**

The reasons why the participants preferred Kütahya Dumlupınar University are shaped around four main themes. It is possible to group these themes within the framework of rational conditions, influence of friends/acquaintances, promotional activities, and quality of education/training. The most frequently encountered code is rational conditions (n=19). Rational conditions were expressed by the participants as not getting enough points from YÖS to choose big city universities, the high cost of these cities, the fact that



Kütahya is a cheap city to live in, and that the department they want to study is not available in other universities. In some cases, more than one reason may be effective in the decision to choose a university.

*"My family lives in Istanbul, but it is very difficult to study at universities in Istanbul. There is no room for international students, or they take Syrians at most. So, we have to go to private universities for other foreigners. They are also very expensive" (P9, Arabia).*

*"I took two exams, one for Isparta and one for Kütahya. I won both, but I chose Kütahya because I wanted to be a mining engineer, it was my dream. That's how I chose Kütahya" (P2, Somalia).*

*"I normally wanted Ankara, but my exam score was not enough for Ankara. Kütahya and Eskişehir were the closest to Ankara. I chose Kütahya among them" (P20, Kyrgyzstan).*

Friends/acquaintances who have or have had previous education at the university can be effective in university selection. Rational conditions can also create a reinforcing effect in the decision-making process together with the influence of friends.

*"Firstly, when I applied, I wanted to study Computer Engineering. Then there was a friend who studied Civil Engineering. He recommended me. Dumlupınar University was open at the time of application. That is how I applied to Kütahya" (P11, Arabia).*

*"My friend was studying here, he won here. He also won here from Arabia. He is from Afghanistan. After he won here, he preferred it. He said come. I thought of going to Bursa, but I did not win the university there. I preferred here and came here" (P3, Arabia).*

*"Most of my friends from Kyrgyzstan are here. So, I am satisfied". (P20, Kyrgyzstan).*

Promotional activities were expressed as one of the reasons that influenced the participants' preference for the university. Promotional activities carried out on behalf of the university in their countries of origin, the university's website, activities promoting the city, excursions, and the recognition of the academic staff within the university are among the reasons for the participants to choose the university. The promotion of the university through social media platforms has an important effect.

*"We travelled around Kütahya. I liked it. I saw the images of the university. We watched the promotional video of the school." (P10, Syria).*

*"I have never seen it; I only saw it in photographs. I watched the video, that's it." (P21, Syria).*

*"I did research on the internet and found a teacher I liked very much in terms of his expertise." (P19, Iraq).*

*"Afterwards, I gathered information about Kütahya on Youtube. I also looked at the university, and I actually liked it." (P5, Azerbaijan).*

The quality of education and training at Kütahya Dumlupınar University is a factor in the participants' choice of the university where they will study. Both the physical

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characteristics of the place of education and the approach of the faculty members to the students and their competence in their fields of expertise make the university attractive for prospective students.

### **Sociocultural Adaptation**

It is possible to mention certain categories that define the sociocultural adaptation processes of the participants. These are network-type socialization, social relations, language in socialization, social acceptance, social activities and culture. One of the most important processes that characterize the participants' sociocultural adaptation is network-type socialization (n=49). The concept of network-type socialization was used to express the fact that the majority of the participant's interactions in his/her daily life were with individuals from his/her country of origin. This situation also emphasizes that social interaction with Turkish students is low. It means that students from the same country of origin help each other, seek solutions to existing problems within such informal networks rather than in a formal framework, and that the circle of friends is mostly composed of individuals from their own country of origin, and newcomers are also included in this group.

*"For example, I did not understand homework, I asked a friend to help me, we both didn't understand, but we called a lot of friends, they all made excuses, no one helped us, and we constantly supported each other among the internationals" (P15, Turkmenistan).*

*"My circle of friends is mostly friends from Syria. I want to find more Turkish friends to improve my Turkish, but they, for example, stay in the dormitory, I don't know, there is not much time to meet. To be honest, I didn't talk much either." (P13, Syria).*

*"Yes, we have a Yemeni student association here. We are interested in newcomers. For example, someone comes here, I pick him/her up and send him/her home from the bus station, he/she stays with us for two or three nights. I bring him to the university with me, I register him to TÖMER, I help him, and then he stays in the dormitory. Or we rent another house for him. In other words, we take care of newcomers" (P1, Yemen).*

Among the social activities of the participants; football activities, weekend trips, activities with other students from different countries and Turks, city trips, visiting historical places, participating in activities through different student communities. In their social interactions, they generally have social relations with other international students from their countries of origin and other international students, as well as social exchanges with Turkish students in the classroom. In particular, student societies function as an important factor in both creating social networks and participating in social activities.

The most important factor affecting the socialization of the participants is language. Language-related difficulties were expressed in the socialization areas where they interact with Turks. Participants stated that they tried ways such as being in different social spaces and watching Turkish TV series to improve their Turkish. Having Turkish friends in their country of origin and having a closer interaction with Turkish also strengthens the use of language in the field of socialization.

*"I cannot say that education or Turkish friends contributed to the language. When I came the first year, I was going to a Turkish language course. I didn't understand anything there. The things you learn in life are completely different and I started to work. I was working as a babysitter or something like that during the summer holidays for a rich family in Istanbul. The child was a three-year-old boy who was just starting to speak. I was asking him what this is and so on. I was able to improve my language mostly because of work. After that, I went to Antalya, Çanakkale and so on during my summer holidays, and I improved it by working." (P15, Turkmenistan).*

*"When I was in Somalia, I was watching Turkish TV series and that is how I improved my Turkish." (P7, Somalia).*

*"There are Turks there, there are Turks who were my friends and even classmates with me in high school. I learnt it from them. We even have Turkish channels and that is how I learnt it." (P5, Azerbaijan).*

Sociocultural adaptation is a two-way process. Although international students have the motivation to adapt to the society they live in through language and education, the successful continuation of the adaptation process is closely related to social acceptance. The participants mentioned different experiences of social acceptance based on their relations with Turks. Although they thought that Turks were generally friendly and hospitable, they reported that they had negative experiences especially in finding a house.

*"Yes, they are open, but I saw something, I mean, there was racism in Istanbul, I mean, I saw it, of course, every place is human, and every person is different." (P8, Somalia).*

*"I didn't feel any exclusion inside or outside the school, I didn't see any exclusion. Only some teachers are helpful, and some are not. Some people did not want Syrians, but I have not witnessed that in recent years." (P11, Arabia).*

*"People are not very sincere about foreigners and giving them houses. I have foreign friends who have just arrived. They are not giving them houses right now. Both on behalf of my friends and on my own behalf, we could not find a house easily." (P7, Somalia).*

Culture closely affects sociocultural adaptation. In different studies, among the most attractive features of Turkish culture in the perception of international students are that Turkish people are friendly, warm-blooded, helpful, and hospitable (Özek, 2019: 99; Delikkulak Sak, 2019: 75). In this study, the participants' sociocultural perception of Turkey, Turks and Turkish culture is based on "belonging" and "closeness". Feeling culturally close to Turks, feeling like in the country of origin in Turkey due to cultural proximity, adapting to Turkish culture through learning the language through TV series, and common feelings based on the similarity between the two countries are the prominent expressions in the culture category.

### **Educational Situation**

There are five themes in the analysis of the educational status of the participants. These themes are academic achievement, the way the course is taught, relations with lecturers, language in education, and in-class relations. Academic achievement was the most

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frequently recurring category (n=37). In general, the academic grade point average of the participants is low, and they have difficulties in the lessons. Although language is one of the reasons for this failure, apart from language, it is also difficult to understand the scientific aspect of the department they are studying. When language and the scientific framework of the courses are combined, it becomes difficult to achieve good success in the courses. On the one hand, language and on the other hand, academic achievement remains low due to difficulties in understanding the content of the courses.

In parallel with their academic success, the way the course is taught is also an important factor for the participants in understanding the course. The use of the same lecturing and questioning techniques for international students as for Turkish students, the lack of a lecture style adapted to international students, especially the lecturer's fast speech in the lecture, and the lectures being taught in Turkish and in a difficult language are some of the difficulties expressed. At this point, in cases where the lectures are given in English, it has a positive effect on the success of the course for the student.

*"They treat foreigners like Turks" (P14, Palestine).*

*"And also, I mean, the department of mechanical engineering is difficult, I mean, we know that, right? Mechanical engineer, I mean, it is insufficient to write, I mean, it needs to be practical." (P8, Somalia).*

*"Of course, I have some problems. Some lecturers explain well, some do not. They speak fast." (P3, Arabia).*

*"Even though I want to raise my average, I cannot do it even if I try to study because the course given to me is in Turkish and it is taught in a difficult language. Because I have to translate." (P11, Arabia).*

One of the important factors affecting the educational status of the students is the relationship with the lecturers. The communication with the lecturers and the approach of the lecturer have a positive effect on the students' understanding of the course.

*"My communication with the lecturers is very good, from my own point of view, the lecturers help me. On the contrary, when I went to his/her room, they had a warm approach. Of course, I cannot say all of them, but I can say that most of them are good, they welcome me with warmth. On the contrary, they were asking if there were international friends starting from the first class. You raise your hand, you get acquainted, and then the teacher says, "Do you understand? If you don't understand, we will explain it a little slower for you, you know, I didn't do anything in that respect." (P15, Turkmenistan).*

*"Very good, it was really good. It was very understandable. Since we are internationals, they were explaining in English. They were trying to explain." (P9, Arabia).*

*"I mean, the teachers here are more helpful. When the lecturers here recognize the international student, they try very hard to help." (P13, Syria).*

The fact that the courses are in Turkish is cited as one of the difficulties encountered by the participants in understanding the course. The participants, who see Turkish as a difficult language, especially have difficulty in understanding the academic language. For

this reason, they need to spend more time studying than Turkish students in order to understand the course. They also have difficulty in understanding the assignments given.

*"Because Somalis always do education in English. Then I know 'two plus two', I mean I understand it, but they say 2+2 in Turkish..." (P12, Somalia).*

*"I think the lecturer should pay special attention. The rest are situations that concern the student. Convenience should be provided. For example, the name of a book is given in the lesson. If I talk about 1st grade, the book is written in an academic language, and it takes a long time to translate it." (P11, Arabia).*

*"I don't understand what the teacher wants in that homework. I translate it into Arabic, it doesn't come out in Arabic. I translate it into English, and it doesn't work there either." (P3, Arabia).*

Another effective factor in educational situations is classroom relationships. There are positive and negative experiences about the relationship with Turkish students. While some participants stated that there was co-operation with Turkish students in terms of lecture notes, some participants stated that there was no co-operation, and the level of social relationship was very low. In some cases, it was stated that there was no communication on any subject other than the course.

*"Yes, I help Turkish students. There is no internationalization anyway." (P2, Somalia).*

*"Yes, we get a lot, a lot... help." (P12, Somalia).*

*"Yes, some of them helped us a lot and even gave us their lecture notes. Some of them looked after me and I experienced a lot of discrimination because I was Syrian." (P6, Syria).*

*"I know most of my classmates, but I don't talk to them much, I only ask questions about the lessons." (P20, Kyrgyzstan).*

*"For example, I don't understand the homework, I ask a friend for help, we both don't understand, but we called a lot of our friends, they all made excuses, no one helped us, and we are constantly supporting each other among the internationals. Did you make it? If you have homework, I will give you the computer, it was free today, I do this from my point of view. In that regard, I have seen wrong reactions from Turks." (P15, Turkmenistan).*

When the participants encounter any problem during the education period and in their daily lives, they have individual ways of producing solutions other than institutional solutions. When they have any problems in the courses, they consult with their lecturers, and when they have a problem outside the university, they look for someone to consult. They primarily get help from their friends or seek solutions to their problems on the internet. When they have problems in understanding the lecture, they take audio recordings of the lectures and repeat the lectures by listening to them over and over again. When they look for someone to consult as a lecturer, they prefer lecturers who can speak their own language.

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### Views on the University

It is possible to classify the opinions of the participants about the university under six themes: Social activities at the university, characteristics of the campus, education and training functioning of the university, library services, cafeterias and canteens, office services. When the social activities at the university are evaluated in terms of the activities organized for international students, there are different participant opinions. While some participants find the activities for international students insufficient, some participants see the existing communities for international students as sufficient to produce solutions to problems. While the participants use natural areas such as sports fields and sightseeing places at the university as social activity areas, social areas such as cafes on the campus are considered insufficient.

*"The landscapes at the university are very good for people. Sometimes I really think that I will go to school, but at the same time I will go for sightseeing. We go sightseeing in between. We go to the lake, we take photos there. We ride bicycles. We collect good memories." (P9, Arabia).*

*"There are no activities for international students at the university." (P11, Arabia).*

*"I mean, I know that there is everything at the university. I think there are places to sit, do sports, etc. everything. I think it is not lacking in this regard." (P3, Arabia).*

*"Otherwise, there are very nice activities, for example, when I recently arrived, stands were opened in the garden of the university. I asked about the things I was curious about." (P5, Azerbaijan).*

*"There is a community for all foreign students at the university. If we have a problem there, we communicate." (P19, Iraq).*

The most positively perceived feature of the campus by the participants is its physical structure, nature, and environmental features. Participants can do many activities such as walking and taking photographs in the campus, which has a large and wide area.

*"The campus is very beautiful. We go to play football. I like Kütahya very much. We do all our activities at the university. It is a large place, and the weather is very nice." (P1, Yemen).*

*"It is very beautiful in terms of appearance. As an Azerbaijani, I was surprised when I first came here, it has a very large area." (P5, Azerbaijan).*

The participant views on the functioning of education and training at the university have a positive approach in terms of the academic quality of the faculty members, their approach to students, university administration and education system.

*"There are good professors, there is a good rector, so I will try to reach a good level next year, I will struggle, I will bring students." (P14, Palestine).*

*"For example, I looked at the university in Mersin and it is really not comfortable. My friends took me to Mersin University for a tour and it is not comfortable at all. In one building, there were both Finance and International Relations departments. The classes were small and even the*

*behavior of the lecturers there was not very good. It is the opposite of our university." (P6, Syria).*

*"I don't know, I think I got a good education. Of course, I can't say it was perfect, but I think I got a good education. I mean, when I compare it with my friends in Russia or Turkmenistan, I think my education is superior to them." (P15, Turkmenistan).*

While the majority of the participants expressed their satisfaction with the food served in the student canteens in Bedesten, there were also participants with negative opinions about the canteens. Although they stated that they are generally accustomed to Turkish food, they are in favor of the idea of having food from their own culture.

The most important issue that determines the participants' university image is the recognition of the university in the country of origin. This is also a situation that is evaluated in terms of the potential to create job opportunities in the country. The statements of the participant who expressed the university image are as follows:

*"There is a ranking. For example, they say Istanbul is the best. There is a ranking like Kütahya ranks 15th. Unfortunately, Kütahya is not in that ranking. (...) We can work in the private sector, or we can establish a business and work, but not in the state. If I had received a diploma from Istanbul University or Ankara, it would have provided an opening." (P11, Arabia).*

Although there are those who benefit from the library facilities of the university and are satisfied with them, there is a desire for more foreign language resources. At the same time, the need for a counselling office that can help international students especially during registration times, obtaining student cards, etc. was expressed.

### **Views on the City**

Participants' views on the city can be evaluated in terms of the size of the city, socialization opportunities, belonging to the city, city-specific qualities, social structure of the city and transportation. The fact that Kütahya is a small city fosters the perception of a safe city compared to big cities such as Istanbul. This situation is expressed by the participants that life in Kütahya is calmer, safer, and easier. The reasons such as being a quiet city, the people being more friendly, the lack of traffic, and the fact that it is not a very active city encourage students to focus on their studies and that they do not encounter many problems are seen as positive features of Kütahya.

*"For example, I do not like Istanbul because it is crowded and noisy. I mean, too big a city is not good." (P14, Palestine).*

*"I don't like crowds anyway, I like calmness, so Kütahya is good for me." (P7, Somalia).*

*"I would recommend Kütahya for those who come for education for school purposes. Why? Because in a city like Istanbul, you will always be in a crowd. I don't know what it is, traffic, lifestyle, people's things, you have to be active all the time. You can't be comfortable, so you have to constantly think about how much money I have left to go from there to there or how much I have left to pay my rent, and because you are a foreigner, you have*

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*to constantly think about these things. Or, I don't know, you have to work, etc. I realized that I would have a lot of difficulties there, but of course, after years, I understood this after a year or two, otherwise, at first I was wondering if I had come to the village, don't get me wrong, when I really came to Kütahya, I wondered if I had come to the village, but now I really don't regret in any way that I chose Kütahya. More precisely, since I have been here for eight years, it has become like my own hometown. I mean, I know every single street and everything. I know where I can go, how I can reach everything. In the same way for the school, I mean, I don't regret it at all, in short, because I chose this place." (P15, Turkmenistan).*

However, the small size of the city, the lack of social activity areas and the lack of diversity in leisure time evaluation areas were emphasized by the participants among the insufficient features of the city. Stating that socialization opportunities are limited to shopping malls and historical sites, the participants expressed the need to develop entertainment activity areas. Participants who spend a certain period of time in Kütahya also strengthen their belonging to the city.

*"Actually, as I said, I got used to this place like my hometown, like my own city." (P15, Turkmenistan).*

*"I miss Kütahya even in my own hometown (...) If I had the opportunity, I would choose Kütahya again." (P17, Azerbaijan).*

*"We went to Eskişehir with friends. When I came to Kütahya, I felt very comfortable, like I was back home." (P1, Yemen).*

One of the most important categories in which negative opinions about the city are expressed is transportation. Expensive bus fares for students, crowded buses and inadequate routes are some of the deficiencies mentioned. Despite the problems in terms of transportation, the fact that the city is economically cheap, especially for international students, makes living in the city more possible in terms of rent expenses, food, etc. compared to other cities. In terms of security, there is a perception that it is a safer city compared to a big city like Istanbul. Apart from the calmness and cheapness of the city, the most emphasized characteristic of the city is that Kütahya is a cold city. The deficiencies in the city were evaluated on the axis of the city-university relationship in a perspective that also negatively affects university life.

### **Future Goals**

Participants' goals for the future are organized around four themes: Staying and working in Turkey, maintaining the relationship with Turkey, returning to the country of origin, and travelling to Europe/America. Staying and working in Turkey is the most frequently repeated category (n=23). Participants plan their professional life in Turkey by establishing their own business or finding a job in Turkey after the end of their education. There are also participants who plan to start their own business in Turkey after travelling to another country and accumulating capital. The more time they spend in Turkey, the stronger their sense of belonging to the country and the greater the tendency to build a future in Turkey. In some cases, both belonging to the country of origin and Turkey coexist.



*"I plan to go to another country to earn better money and then return to Turkey to establish a business for myself. I do not plan to return to Kyrgyzstan, I only go there on holidays. In general, I plan to stay in Turkey." (P20, Kyrgyzstan).*

*"I will never return to Syria anymore. Because I got used to Turkey, I liked it, it became my culture, and I forgot my original culture." (P6, Syria).*

Some participants, on the other hand, expressed their desire to maintain their relations with Turkey after returning to their country of origin, even though they do not have any future plans for Turkey. It is possible to say that they have a perspective at the intersection of belonging to Turkey and rational career planning. In particular, maintaining trade relations was expressed as one of the prominent future goals in this sense. Among the reasons for maintaining relations with Turkey, there is also an effort to create an alternative for the future professional life of the individual.

The most important motivation of the participants who want to return to their country of origin after completing their education in Turkey is to contribute to their country in the fields of labor needed. One of the most important conditions that will ensure the return of the participants, especially those from Syria, is the stabilization of their countries. A small number of participants expressed their desire to continue their professional life in America or Europe after completing their education in Turkey.

*"Yes, teacher, if possible. I am studying for Somalia." (P8, Somalia).*

*"After school, wherever I find an opportunity, I want to be in Turkey more. I love this country very much, my heart is very attached to it. If the war ends, of course we want to return, but there will be more time, that is, the country has much more time to get back on its feet. As the situation improves, my father will return anyway." (P13, Syria).*

*"That's why I don't think I will stay here, I don't think I will go to my hometown and work there. What I am thinking about right now is going abroad. Either going to England or Dubai to work as an interpreter." (P15, Turkmenistan).*

## **Conclusion**

In this study, the reasons why international students choose Turkey and the university, their sociocultural adaptation, their educational situation, their views on the university and the city, and future expectations are discussed. Rational conditions and cultural proximity come to the fore in the reasons for choosing Turkey. While rational conditions and the circle of acquaintances have an impact on the reasons for choosing the university, promotional activities play an important role. In both choices, networks appear to be one of the most important meso factors that sustain educational migration.

In the study, it was determined that students' sociocultural adaptation levels developed in relation to social belonging. Language is the most important factor affecting students' socio-cultural adaptation and academic achievement both positively and negatively. When the relationship between the codes is examined, it is seen that there is a close relationship between social relations and network-type socialization codes. The most

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prominent form of socialization that international students have is network-type socialization and this form of socialization also gives an idea about the social relations they have. It is concluded that students exhibit network-type socialization behavior as a dominant element in their social relations. Network type socialization is a concept that refers to the network of social relations that students establish with other international students, especially with their friends from their countries of origin. In this respect, it has been determined that international students primarily use network-type socialization channels in social relations, educational activities, lessons, and problems they encounter. Therefore, many tasks fall on universities as institutions, cities as structures, and policy makers in Turkey at macro level in order to solve the behavior patterns of international students to resort to network-type social relations. These solution channels will both increase the level of belonging of international students and increase their level of success.

Culture emerges as a determining factor in the study. Culture stands out as a determining factor in international students' reasons for choosing Turkey and their sociocultural adaptation. The determinants of the prominence of the culture factor are located in a wide range from Turkish TV series to sharing the same religion. For international students, cultural diffusion and interaction have been the main determining factor in different dimensions. On the other hand, the experiences gained by international students as a result of cultural interaction during their education in Turkey have created an intense emotional belonging related to cultural adaptation processes.

International students are social subjects who carry their experiences about the country, education, university, city, or social structure on behalf of both the country of origin and the country of experience. Therefore, international students act as carriers of culture, politics, trade, and many other elements in the international recognition of countries. In this respect, it is important for international students to have positive experiences in education and sociocultural adaptation processes. Students' expectations regarding the educational process and socialization, as well as institutional expectations, provide a framework for improving international students' adaptation to the educational system and the sociocultural environment.

International students have potential to increase, carry and direct intercultural communication across borders, cultures, and languages. The role of international studentship is one of the main potentials of today's human-centered age and international students are the determining and guiding force in intercultural and intercommunal relations. In this respect, the social, cultural, economic, and political mobilization of international students between the country of origin and the country of study has a strong potential for discussion in the context of internationalization and 'soft power'.

Turkey has a very high potential to be a center of attraction for international students due to its geopolitical location. The most important advantage of Turkey's geopolitical location is that it is a center of attraction based on cultural geography. One of the most important channels to increase international student potential in terms of Turkey's internationalization strategies and university programs is promotional activities. It is a necessity to develop an institutionalization process that puts international students at the center. In order for this institutionalization process to be successful, there is a need for studies addressing the sociocultural adaptation levels and problems of international students.

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