



## “A THOUSAND HEARINGS ARE NOT WORTH ONE SEEING”: SOUTH KOREAN AND JAPANESE EXCHANGE STUDENTS' JOURNEY IN TURKEY

“GÖRDÜĞÜNÜZ BİR ŞEY DUYDUĞUNUZ BİRÇOK ŞEYE BEDELDİR”: GÜNEY KORE VE JAPONYA DEĞİŞİM ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN TÜRKİYE YOLCULUĞU

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10.33537/sobild.2019.10.2.3

#### Makale Bilgisi

Gönderildiği tarih: 12-06-2019  
Kabul edildiği tarih: 26-06-2019  
Yayınlanma tarihi: 30.06.2019

#### Article Info

Date submitted: 12-16-2019  
Date accepted: 26-06-2019  
Date published: 30.06.2019

#### Anahtar sözcükler

Uluslararası Öğrenci Değişimi, Öğrenci Hareketliliği, Global Vatandaşlık, Dönüşümsel Öğrenme

#### Keywords

International Exchange Students, Student Mobility, Transformative Learning, Global Citizenship

#### Öz

Öğrenci hareketliliği ve yurtdışında eğitim araştırmalarının çoğunluğu, ABD ve Birleşik Krallık gibi Batı ülkelerinde yaşanan sorunlara odaklanmaktadır. Bu makale, Batı dışında eğitim gören uluslararası değişim öğrencisi deneyimleri konusunda devam eden araştırmalara katkı sağlamaktadır. Ankara'da eğitim almış olan, 21 Güney Koreli ve dört Japon değişim öğrencisinin deneyimleri ve düşünceleri paylaşılmaktadır. Katılımcıların deneyimlerinin analizi transformatif öğrenme kuramı çerçevesinde yapılmıştır. Tematik analizler aracılığıyla üç ana tema belirlenmiştir 1) Tarihi ittifak kardeşlik demektir, 2) Farklı düşünmeyi öğrenmek ve 3) olumlu bir değişim / etki yaratma arzusu. Sonuçlar, katılımcıların kendileri dışındaki insanlar, kültürler ve diller hakkındaki görüşlerini genişlettikleri ve benzerlikleri kadar farklılıkları takdir etmeyi öğrendikleri bir öğrenme sürecine girdiklerini göstermiştir.

#### Abstract

Majority of student mobility and study abroad research focus on Western contexts such as the United States and the United Kingdom. This paper makes a unique contribution to the ongoing research on international exchange student experiences in non-Western contexts. It shares the voices of 21 South Korean and four Japanese exchange students' through their written reflections while studying in Ankara, Turkey. The analysis of participant experiences was conducted through the lens of transformative learning. Through thematic analysis three overarching themes were identified 1) historic alliance means brotherhood, 2) Learning to think differently, and 3) desire to make a positive change/impact. The results indicated that the participants were engaged in a learning process where they broadened their view of people, cultures, and languages other than their own, and learned to appreciate differences as much as similarities.

## Introduction

In the last decade, each year, more than 3 million students worldwide pursue their academic education as degree seeking international or exchange students (Rienties, Beusaert, Grohnert, Niemantsverdriet & Kommers, 2012). The majority of students who study in an international exchange program usually select countries where English is the native language. The status of English as the dominant language of internalization and education shape the practices of transnational and student mobility (Kell & Vogl, 2010). Therefore, in higher education, the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia are the most popular destinations for international students (Bista, Sharma, & Gaulee, 2018; Ryan & Carroll, 2005). The Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) by the Numbers reported that the number of international students in the United States have reached 1.18 million in 2017. Students from Asia were 77% of this group.

Bista, Sharma, and Gaulee (2018) noted, “to meet the standards of the 21st century, to survive and serve today’s world, it is important for students, both local and international, to move and be mobile as it changes their perspectives, and develop worldviews” (p. 4). To help increase intercultural competence and global awareness more institutions in higher education encourage students to be a part of an international experience such as international exchange and/or faculty led study abroad programs (Jackson, 2016). An interculturally competent individual has willingness to engage in a foreign culture, ability to look upon oneself from the outside and to view the world through the others’ eyes, ability to evaluate others points of view and act as a cultural mediator (Sercu, 2005). In other words, such individual has the knowledge, attitude, and awareness when interacting with people from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and languages (Cui, 2016).

The rationale of this study is consistent with the notion of how student mobility changes student perspectives and help develop their worldviews (Bista et al., 2018). This study addressed the experiences of international students who were involved in a minimum of 6 months to a year exchange program. It specifically provides insight to the voices of South Korean and Japanese students in the Turkish context, while being enrolled in a Human Resources Management course at a university in Ankara, Turkey through their reflective journals. The analysis of participant experiences was conducted through the lens of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1990). This paper makes a contribution to the ongoing research on international exchange student experiences in non-Western contexts.

## Literature Review

In the last decade, few studies focused on the perspectives and experiences of international exchange students in the context of Turkey. Majority of these studies focused on the experiences of **EuR**opean Community **A**ction **S**cheme for the **M**obility of **U**niversity **S**tudents (ERASMUS) (Aksoy, Uzunoglu, & Akyar, 2017; Cankaya, 2017; Irmakli, 2017; Kagitcibasi, Kisbusakarya, & Aydogdu, 2017; Özberk, Boztunç Öztürk, Yilmaz Findik, & Kapti, 2017).

Turkey is not a country where an international student necessarily comes to learn or practice English. However, in recent years Turkey has attracted more international students. Snoubar and Celik (2013) stated it is due to the rise on the educational opportunities in Turkey as accommodation, tuition, and school and expenses are cheaper compared to the universities in the United States or other European countries. Furthermore, Turkey’s historical past as well as geographical location where East meets West makes it a popular destination. According to Snoubar and Celik (2013) international students who come to Turkey to study are usually from African, Middle Eastern, Turkic, and Balkan countries. Since Turkey is a Muslim country majority of international students are also Muslim (Çetin, Bahar, & Griffiths, 2017). In a recent study conducted by Alpaydin (2018) he interviewed 23 graduate students about their experiences in Turkey. Except for one student who was from Japan the rest of them were from 17 other countries such as Kosovo, Afghanistan, Congo, Mali, Cameroon, Albania, Azerbaijan, and Uzbekistan which is the similar to aforementioned demographics. The participants were enrolled in various state universities in Turkey. The findings revealed that the participants were happy about the quality of education they received; however, they also felt the graduate education in Turkey was for Turkish students and did not really meet the needs and interests of the international students.

Çetin et al., (2017) in their study examined the experiences of 421 international students who were studying in different state and private universities in Turkey. They initially interviewed nine students, then administered a Likert-scale survey to all other participants. In the final stage of data collection 12 participants provided some written reflections to specific qualitative questions. Whether the participants were undergraduate or graduate students was not mentioned. Overall, their experiences were positive where they felt comfortable with culture, food, language, and people. However, the data also revealed that the non-Muslim students, especially female students, felt there was lack of religious freedom in Turkey.

In another study Irmakli (2017) focused on the experiences of 39 incoming exchange students studying at a university in Istanbul, Turkey, in 2016 and 2017. These students were enrolled in the Language Center and

learning Turkish language and culture before they started a degree program at the university. The mixed-method study data was collected through focus group discussions and a questionnaire. The study aimed to investigate if the ERASMUS and Mevlana exchange mobility programs influenced students' perspectives of the host culture and lifestyle, in this case in Turkey. The findings revealed that students had incorrect representations about Turkish culture. They found out that the representations to be mostly wrong (though some were true) through their own personal experience. Yet, overall, the impact of the exchange programs was still positive.

Kagıtcıbası, Kisbu-Sakarya, and Aydogdu's (2017) study focused on 137 exchange students studying at a university in Istanbul, Turkey as well. There were two groups of students—73 European students who were participating in the ERASMUS program and 64 American, Canadian, and Australian students—who were in Turkey through bilateral agreements between their universities. The authors argued that the European students had more prior experience with Turkish people than the American, Canadian, and Australian students due to there being a larger number of Turkish immigrants in Europe. The data were collected through a rating-scale questionnaire. The study aimed to understand the factors that play a role in the outcome of the participating students' overall experiences. The students' own attitudes and personal attributes were believed to influence their experiences while in Turkey. The findings revealed that diverse aspects of the students' background (country of origin) and their personality (related self) were important factors that influenced them to have diverse experiences.

As can be noted in the literature review there is no specific study which focuses on the experiences of South Korean and Japanese students in Turkish context. To fill the gap in the literature the following research question, "What are the perceptions and experiences of South Korean and Japanese students who came to study at a Turkish university?" has been identified. This study provides a unique insight to the narratives of such international exchange students.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Mezirow's Transformation Theory is used as a lens to understand the immediate and changing perspectives observed in the participants of this study. Transformation theory developed by Mezirow (1991) is defined as "constructivist, an orientation which holds that the way learners interpret and reinterpret their sense experience is, central to making meaning and hence learning" (p. 222). In the process of transformational learning, adult learners critically reflect upon their previous assumptions and provide an explanation of their change in perspective as they engage in educational or academic work (King, 2009).

Taylor (1994) applied Mezirow's Transformation Theory to people living abroad who were developing intercultural competency. Taylor (2000) argued that emotions play an important role in Transformation Theory. The participants in this study made sense of and gave meaning to their experiences through written reflections throughout the semester while they were enrolled in a semester long Human Resources Management course. Reflective journaling is an important part of the transformational learning process (Grabov, 1997). Reflective journaling facilitates the students change in beliefs and how they redefine their beliefs (Sankey-Rice, Foster, Miller-Foster, & Barrick, 2014). The South Korean and Japanese exchange students' reflections formed the basis of the data collection.

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions and experiences of a total of 25 South Korean and Japanese exchange students who were enrolled in a business course at a university in Turkey. Qualitative research study approach was adopted because the purpose of this study was to understand the in-depth views and feelings of exchange students studying in Ankara, Turkey through their written reflections.

### **Research Setting and Participants**

The research setting of this study was a public university in Ankara, Turkey. The majority of the instruction at the institution is conducted in Turkish, however about 30% of the instruction is conducted in English. Due to the bilateral agreement among universities every department at this Turkish university is obligated to offer a variety of courses instructed only in English. This availability of English-instructed courses attracts a number of English-speaking international students to the university. The university has bilateral academic agreements (universities signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU)) with number of universities from South Korea, Japan, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Taiwan. According to the agreement, each academic year, South Korean and Japanese universities approve up to 30 outgoing students to study in Turkey. At the university, where this study took place, in the 2015-2016 academic year, 120 students—the maximum number of international exchange students recorded thus far—arrived at the university. However, the following academic year, due to various terrorist attacks that happened in different parts of Ankara, killing more than 150 people in public areas, the number of incoming exchange students dropped significantly to one fifth of the previous year. For example, during the duration of this study, three South Korean female students returned to their country fearing other possible terror attacks.

Twenty-five students in their early twenties participated in this study. Out of the 25, twenty-one were

from South Korea and four were from Japan. Twelve of the participants were female, and thirteen were male. All participants were enrolled in various disciplines in their own country.

### **Organization and Services for International Exchange Students**

An important background information to note about the university, the research setting, was that the exchange students were able to interact closely with other exchange students at the Turkish language school (free for all of the exchange students) as well as the university's European Student Network (ESN) events. The university has the one of the largest ESN organizations in Turkey as well as in Europe. ESN is a voluntary student organization supported by the EU, with the motto "students helping students". The events organized by the ESN of the university enables all international students to meet and share new ideas. The ESN events are an important aspect of the exchange programs since they aim to bring all exchange students together to share their own culture as well as engage and immerse in other cultures regardless of their background. The ESN also has close contacts with embassies of different countries which invite all exchange students to special events. The university's ESN organizes trips, concerts, festivals to bring the incoming and outgoing exchange students together so they can share their experiences. Many Turkish students who have been an exchange student in another country volunteer and are responsible of the new incoming exchange students' orientation to the university as well as Ankara. The Turkish students try to help the exchange students on what they call 'survival' matters. The effort by the Turkish students are always welcomed by the exchange students as it takes a shorter time for them to adopt and make friends.

One very important fact that needs to be mentioned is that in general international exchange students take classes with other international or exchange students. The Turkish students typically do not prefer to take English-instructed departmental courses.

### **Data Collection**

The data of this study came from the reflective journals of students who were enrolled in a semester-long Human Resources Management course taught in English. The journal entries were assigned in English. At this university, the duration of a semester is 14 weeks. In this Human Resources Management course, every other week the students were given a prompt to reflect on. As in the case of any given assignment, some of the students wrote quality reflection entries, while others did not put in as much time and effort.

The purpose of the reflective assignment was to make students think and reflect on their cultural learning experiences. According to O'Connell and Dymont (2013), if carefully implemented by the instructor, "Journals

provide a place for students to record observations of people, places, events, and natural occurrences that happen around them" (p. 24). In addition, O'Connell and Dymont argue that journals are a great tool to facilitate learning through experience and help students become more engaged and active in their own learning. Specifically, "As students use journals to capture their impressions of the things going on around them and their places/roles in those events, they are able to make connections between what they've learned in class and other parts of their lives" (p. 25).

The first journal assignment asked questions such as, "What do you expect to gain from your experience as an ERASMUS Exchange business student at X university, Turkey? Why did you choose Turkey? Please explain. What are your initial reflections about Turkey and Turkish culture in general? What seemed so different and so similar to your culture?". There were a total of 6 journal entries throughout the semester. The data collection started in spring 2013 and continued until the end of spring 2016. In 2017 and 2018, the Business Administration department did not receive any exchange student applicants from East Asia due to the political turmoil in Turkey.

### **Data Analysis**

The reflective journals were read without any coding. During the second and third rounds of reading, significant participant quotes and passages that stood out were highlighted, bolded, and underlined, and eventually color-coded into themes (Saldana, 2009). Using thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) three overarching themes were identified in the reflective journals: 1) historic alliance means brotherhood, 2) Learning to think differently, and 3) desire to make a positive change/impact.

All students were assigned a pseudonym to maintain their confidentiality, though the names were chosen to reflect their gender and their nationality. English grammar and spelling errors within quotes of the written journal entries have not been corrected, so as to retain the authentic voice of the participant.

### **Findings**

#### ***Historic alliance means brotherhood***

As shared in the literature review, Turkey is not among the top countries that an international or exchange students would choose to study. In their journal entries the participants shared why they specifically wanted to come to Turkey. The reason was based on the historical events and relations between the countries. Kwan from South Korea in his reflective journal wrote:

*Korean people always think Turkey as a close friend since the Korean war because*



*Turkey gave us military aid and it leads to maintain friendly relations until now. The political relationship between Korea and Turkey is good so I feel easy to be here.*

Jung who was also from South Korea explained that the most important reason of her choosing to study in Turkey was the positive relationship the two countries have. The close relationship between South Korea and Turkey that Kwan mentioned dates back to the Korean war that started in 1950. To give a brief history of the war, when North Korea invaded South Korea the United Nations intervened, requesting military aid to South Korea (Sayward, 2017). Turkey was the second country to answer the call after the United States, stating "Turkey is ready to meet his responsibilities" (Brown, 2008). The Turkish brigade fought for three years until 1953 defending South Korea. Overall 15,000 Turkish soldiers served during 1950-1953 and 721 were killed. There is a "Heroes Cemetery" in Busan which is a burial ground for United Nations Command (UNC) casualties of the Korean War where 462 Turkish soldiers are buried (Grant, 2005). The relationship between the two nations is referred as "Korean-Turkish brotherhood". After the Korean War, Turkey provided aids for South Korea when Korea was struggling for development between 1960-1980.

South Korea is now one of largest investors in Turkey. Most of the students from South Korea have all mentioned the reason of choosing to study in Turkey as an exchange student was based on the two countries historic past and reference of being brothers. Both countries act of friendship in the past seventy years had a positive impact on the people of South Korea and Turkey, with a mutual respect. Ryung from South Korea in his reflection journal talked about this explicitly: "I knew the historical relationship between Turkey and Korea which call each other Brother's country. I can realize it here in Turkey. Most Turks are really kind and especially the older people treat us like really a younger brother".

Ryung understood what brotherhood between the nations meant when he told the Turkish people he was Korean. He was surprised to be treated like a younger brother among the older generation in Turkey who grew up during the Korean war period.

Gyeong, who was another student from South Korea, thought the Korean culture was "very famous" (as noted in her journal) in Turkey when she first arrived because the people said that they loved Korea very much.

*Their English and my Turkish was poor, it was difficult to communicate. In a couple of weeks, I found out that there was not even a Korean restaurant in Ankara, so the love the Turkish people mentioned was not about the culture or food but our history together.*

Gyeong initially questioned why there was not a Korean restaurant in Ankara. Gyeong soon realized that one of the main ingredients in Korean dishes is pork therefore, thought it was almost impossible for a Korean restaurant to do business in Turkey due to consumption of pork and the Muslim faith. Yet, Gyeong later learned to be creative and cook Korean dishes without pork to Turkish and other Muslim friends.

Jong also mentioned that she attended an international summer school at her university in South Korea a year prior to her study in Turkey. Jong stated that there were many international students from other countries however, she wrote, "I mostly spent hours with Turkish friends. Though our culture, tastes and appearances were different from each other, we had some connection. I thought it might just be related to history." Similarly, Jung wrote, "The relations with Korea is one of the definite reasons. Turkey helped Korea in 1950. And many Koreans thanks for that. Nowadays, two country's relation is closer than before". Iseul also noted, "When I arrived in Istanbul airport I did not know what to do. I was vulnerable in a different country. I met Mustafa at the airport's metro station. He said 'we are brothers (kardes)' when he learned I was Korean."

Even though the historic events between Japan and Turkey are not related to any war, the two nations have built a strong relationship throughout history. This played a role in Japanese students' decision to choose to study in Turkey. Kahori from Japan, referred to two specific historical events that he was highly influenced by during the time of decision-making to choose a county to study abroad. He noted:

*Regarding our historical background, it is apparently well known that the accident of Ertugrul and concomitantly, the Turkish support of at Iraq-Iran war saving Japanese staying in Iran. Those are unforgettable history and prides bridging Turkey to Japan. After finding out these incidents my passion to come to Turkey was raced more.*

The first incident Kahori noted dates back to 1890, where a frigate (a warship) of the Ottoman Empire that sailed to Japan to honor the relationship between the two nations was shipwrecked on the coast of Funakura due to a massive storm. 527 of the crew died and were buried in Japan. A memorial was built in 1891 in Kushimoto that still stands today. The second incident Kahori mentioned took place in 1985, where a Turkish Airlines crew commanded by the Turkish prime minister made a special flight to save 215 Japanese who worked in the Nissan factory in Tehran during the Iran-Iraq war. The flight to Tehran was considered to be very dangerous and risky due to the ongoing war between Iran and Iraq at the time.

Sakika who was also an exchange student from Japan mentioned her decision was impacted by the Turkish people being *pro-Japanese*, exact expression she wrote on her reflection journal, stated:

*Turkey was a mystery for me. When I first came here I did not speak any Turkish, but I knew the warmth of the words coming from the Turkish people that always helped me. I feel the strong connection with the Turks as a family.*

Yori's expectations were also based on the positive relationship between Turkey and Japan and that she never heard anything bad related to Turkey or Turkish people, stating "Turkey is always considered a country that is very hospitable and kind towards the Japanese people. I did not hear anything against Turkey that was bad in Japan. We consider Turks a friend."

The participants decision to study in Turkey were based on a historical reference, the good relationship between their countries. Travelling far away from their home and studying at a country they described as "friendly" impacted their decision where they would feel safe, respected and most importantly welcomed.

### **Learning to think differently**

Most of the participants who came to Turkey have never attended a long-term study abroad before. Few of them prior to their arrival to Ankara visited Europe and the United States either as a tourist or as a participant of a short-term summer camp program. The longest stay in another country has been in Turkey. They defined the experience as an opportunity of once in a life time. One of the participants Ye-eun specifically described her experience with a Korean saying: *A thousand hearings are not worth one seeing*. It was an experience to be lived in person rather than just hear about it.

These exchange students not only engaged and immersed themselves in the Turkish culture but they also had the chance to meet people from different countries around the world. All of the students emphasized that the lived experiences in Turkey broadened their perspectives and changed the way of their thinking on many issues related to culture, religion, and prejudices not only in a local but also in a global scale. For example, Jong stated:

*The news infused that Iran and Iraq are axis of evil and really dangerous. I accepted that without questions. My thoughts have changed [once coming to Turkey]. I met people from Iran, Syria, and other countries from the Middle East. Their stories have extended my knowledge. If I had not come to Turkey, I would never understand them.*

After meeting new people from different parts of the world Jong was able to see the world through their eyes. After her stay in Turkey Jong was able to question the

knowledge and information she was exposed to through the media.

Jang-mi from South Korea, confessed she had prejudices before her stay in Turkey. She said she stereotyped people. Jang-mi admitted in her reflection journal that "I had a stereotype that Japanese were kind but actually cold and cynical." However, after spending nine months in Ankara with her Japanese roommate, Jang-mi mentioned how deeply she regretted her initial thoughts by explaining: "They are so kind and polite. Stereotyping is really harmful. I only heard about them not experienced with them. Thanks to my exchange experience I now have a Japanese sister and a chance to treat foreigners with consideration". Jang-mi expressed how close she felt towards her Japanese roommate, eventually calling her a sister, a member of her family. Jang-mi further expressed in her journal entry that the two have shared many memories and supported each other in good and bad days spent together. Jang-mi noted that she had never imagined she would be roommates with a Japanese student and yet call her a sister due to the historical past between South Korea and Japan.

Kwan expressed that during her stay in Turkey, she met many international students from different parts of the world. She wrote, "I met not only Turkish students but other Erasmus students from Europe, all with different backgrounds, languages and culture. My exchange student experience has taught me how to interact with many kinds of people. I try to understand them." Kwan further noted "Everyone has a different past. People cannot only be judged by the country they come from. Their families, their values, and education all matter." Kwan suggested that one's country of origin can cause people to make generalizations based on some commonly known traditions, culture and social norms. However, things are more complex when influences of family and education surface in one's personality.

Yasuko from Japan perceived her student exchange experience "as an important phase in her life". She described her interaction with people from other countries as one of the most valuable experiences. In her reflection journal she explained it as "I have a different sense of value [now], I take in every new thing I learn and reflect on it. I learned to respect other cultures." Yasuko mentioned that she is always looking for clues on how to approach new things, like she is trying to complete a jigsaw puzzle. Everything she learned and experienced through her study as an exchange student helped her to become a respectful, tolerable, and patient person than ever.

Yu-jin described her living in a foreign country as "I realized that I am conscious of the eyes of others. Having an East Asian appearance made me look different in Turkey and I thought that people were always staring at me". Yet after a couple of months Yu-jin noticed that "they were not staring at me but just looking". She wrote "it was

my own prejudice that was hurting me. I had made up boundaries of my own". Meeting others she noted, "made me realize we may look different but we all want peace and live in a better world."

Ho stated that, "after being exposed to a multicultural environment in Turkey I became more flexible in terms of accepting new things". He further argued, "After encountering new cultures, I can see my own culture through new eyes." He realized how "Korean people look alike. Here in Turkey everyone is different. They have different hair and eye color." Yet, "People in Korea scold people who look different, for example, they stare at men with long hair or unique clothes". Ho's perception in Turkey was "They [Turks] do not seem to care." However, Ho added, even though Turkish people do not care, he felt many stared at him because he was Asian. He noted, "they stare at me like magic". He moreover elaborated on the word magic as he believed the stares were not an implication of a racial discrimination but an admiration of meeting someone from Asia.

Yasuko in her journal entry discussed how surprised she was when her Turkish friend asked about her beliefs for the first time. "What is your religion?" was asked many times by other Turkish people she met as well. Yasuko reflected on how she felt uncomfortable and did not know how to answer the question since she did not believe in any religion. Yasuko explained that people in Japan believe in whatever they want and nobody asks or pays attention to others' religion. The question about her beliefs was the first time she realized she was in a different culture. She noted, "I did not think about religion before. I did not know how it shaped people's choices, life and culture because religion/s, have no effect in Japan. In Turkey some people have strong beliefs, some do not. But somehow they discuss about religion all the time." Yasuko understood that in some countries religion is an important determinant and aspect of a culture.

As can be noted from the participants reflections they not only were exposed to differences through interaction with Turkish people but also other cultures through various international or exchange students they met while living in Turkey.

### ***Desire to make a positive change/impact***

Most of the participants noted in their journals that they would like to participate in making the world a more equitable and sustainable place and therefore, ready to take such responsibility. Jong who lived an hour away from the university campus in South Korea, described his life there as very busy. Jong who studied Economics said he spent most of his time between classes at the library and did not make time to socialize with others. He discussed that he saw international students at his university but felt too shy to talk to them due to English language barrier. However, while in Turkey he was able

to practice his English as everyone around him spoke English as a second/foreign language. Jong no longer felt shy and expressed himself comfortably. The most important thing was that he met many other international students where he argued "people think from their own point of view". He added, "I have changed. We can all make changes. Even if it's just a little one."

In addition, most of the students emphasized that they were not aware of the problems the other international students were having in their own countries. Having shared a room, a common cooking, and dining area at the same dormitory, they interacted with each other closely. They soon discovered they shared common problems. Dong-min, said she had friends from Syria, Afghanistan, and Africa where she went to the Turkish language course every day together. Prior to her arrival to Ankara, Dong-min neither met a student from the Middle East nor from Africa. Dong-min wrote down how every day she spent hours together with her new friends, shared stories with each other, and discussed various world issues. Dong-min wrote, "I have friends from Syria, Afghanistan and Africa that I met here [Turkey]. They have their stories. I have stereotyped people from the Middle East as scary and bad. I have changed. Now, I am a global minded person" and added, "I feel close to them. I can help them." She specifically mentioned that she was not aware of the amount of suffering her friends from these countries have gone through. Dong-min actively started investigating ways she can make a difference in such war-torn communities.

Jung stated that during a short holiday he decided to go on a trip to a country in Europe (the country name was not mentioned). He stayed at a hostel where he met many international students also travelling around Europe. In his reflective journal he wrote "People asked me in which country I was studying as an exchange student." When he replied Turkey, they were surprised. He further wrote, "they wondered if I was not afraid to live in Ankara. They had the misconception that Turkey was an Islamic state." Jung took the time and explained what he learned about Turkey to other international students studying in Europe. He said he wanted to change the misconceptions of people not only about Turkey but other non-European countries as well. As he stated, "I realized that my ideas on a lot of things changed since my exchange study. I am glad they did." Jung was not aware of the suffering that a lot of nations were going through related to war or a political embargo. Jung travelled to Eastern Turkey, Iran and Jordan where he saw people, especially in rural areas, could not meet their basic needs, such as access to clean water or food. In his reflective journal he wrote "We can all fight social injustice, inequality and poverty. We need to be involved to make the world a better place for everyone." Having the opportunity to immerse into a different culture helped them establish a mindset that has no borders.

Kahori who stayed in Turkey for eleven months stated that he was motivated by the differences he encountered in a Muslim country. Kahori who studied in a Catholic high school in Australia and who was a Buddhist believed that “in order to achieve world peace, the key factor is to understand each other.” Kahori a student of Economics, decided that after travelling to rural areas of Turkey, he wanted to work for creating equal opportunities for children in education. He was emotionally affected by the social injustices he encountered in Turkey and firmly stated that he would like to make a change in underprivileged children’s lives. He reflected “I was not aware of the social injustices around the world till I came to Turkey. The problem is everywhere. I just want to help so the children can have a future.”

Most participants engaged in an experience where they believed they have personally changed. As a result of this change, they also wanted to make a difference in others’ lives. They have become more aware and conscious about their own as well as other people’s problems after living in a different country and meeting people from around the world. As Sung-min states “I believe I have the power to help change the world. My time here in Turkey is just the beginning.”

### Discussion and Implications of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions (i.e. reason for choice of study) and experiences of 21 South Korean and 4 Japanese exchange students who studied at a university in Ankara, Turkey for at least a semester or a year. Their reflective journals were written throughout a 14 weeks semester.

The participants choice to study in Turkey as an exchange student was influenced by the positive representation of Turkey in their home countries. Karaca (2013) “In terms of intercultural relations, perception is also the process of a culture’s interpretation of the other culture’s structures, attitudes, actions/reactions, etc. depending on whether the historical and previous experiences/liaisons with each other were positive or negative.” (p. 101) Karaca further noted that “In terms of intercultural relations, a nation’s perception of the other can be perceived from the national narratives, artworks, news, sayings etc. referring to the other. Biases and sympathy for each other is formed and reproduced by these interpretations.” (p. 101) Most participants from South Korea mentioned how many students go to native English-speaking countries. However, they chose Turkey because of its different culture, location, and historical background. They preferred a country where they felt connected to its people and the past.

A mixed nationality friendship while in Turkey helped the participants to understand and engage in differences and similarities among other international exchange students. As Bochner Furnham, and Hutnik

(1985) stated the international students who live in the same host country share foreignness. They define foreignness as international students undergoing similar experiences and having the tendency to spend time together. Regardless of their country of origin many international students experience something new and as a result, they want to share their thoughts with someone who is also going through a similar experience (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2018). Brown (2009) argued that students who share foreignness go through a cultural learning process together. Brown and Aktas’s (2011) study revealed that the cultural learning that the international students go through together is different than the cultural learning the host country offers. As Jong explained, if he did not travel to Turkey, he would not have contact with someone from the Middle East. He became close friends with other students from Syria, Iran and Iraq. Spending a lot of time together, Jong learned to let go of his biases and prejudices against Middle Eastern people. He thought all Middle Eastern countries were at war and the people were extremely unhappy. He wrote in his reflective journal, “I now understand that what we hear in the news is about politics. Politics is ugly. All the people I have met have the kindest heart. It is not our differences that we should focus on. It is our similarities that should bring us together.” Jong’s thoughts also support Gudykunst’s (1998) arguments. Gudykunst stated that cross cultural contact among international students helps the development of a mindful attitude which is an important aspect of building a world community based on civility and tolerance. Brown and Aktas (2011) also stated that the international students that share and experience things together have the feeling of contribution to peace as a community and that their relationship will have an impact on other international group interactions in the future.

Dong-min’s concern over other nations and countries supports Israel’s (2012) definition of a global citizen. According to Israel, a global citizen is someone who identifies with being part of an emerging world community and whose actions contribute to building this community’s values and practices. A global citizen has a sense of belonging to a world community and is concerned about other countries and continents (Jackson, 2016). The phrase Dong-min used, “I can help them” was mentioned in the context that she would like to be part of the solution of any problem. The theme ‘desire to make a positive change/impact’ emphasized that the exchange students are pursuing a path of becoming a global citizen. In other words, they emphasized the notion of “finding one’s place in the world community, contributing to it effectively, and understanding the rights as well as responsibilities of living and working in a globalized world” (Ortloff & Shonia, 2015, pp. 85-86). The participants did not use the term global citizen but instead becoming global-minded. The student exchange program is an important



aspect of a university's promotion of globalization as well as a path for students' global citizenship.

The educational institutions and universities mission in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should promote the notion of global citizenship where no one is superior over another and increase global connections to develop the human side of life, to help construct societies and social relations to promote world peace (Rhoads & Szelenyi, 2011). In addition, as Marginson (2010) stated, emphasis of higher education needs to be beyond economic development of nations and opportunities for individuals but rather need to focus on to better serve society and advance the human condition around the world.

### **Limitations of the Study**

As with all research studies, the current study has a couple of limitations. The sample only represented voices of 25 students from South Korea and Japan. Especially the Japanese student sample was 4. Therefore, the findings may not apply to all South Korean and Japanese exchange students. In addition, even though it was a voluntary participation, since the participants wrote the reflection journals as part of an academic course they may not have been as open as intended with their views and experiences.

### **Future Research**

It is important to further explore the factors that influence international exchange students' experiences in Turkey. In addition, it would be valuable to examine the experiences of the Turkish exchange students who chose to study in South Korea and Japan.

### **Conclusion**

'A frog in a pond' is a Korean proverb given as an example by Jong that meant 'a narrow-minded person'. The proverb is explained as if the frog always stays in the same pond, the pond is as big as an ocean. South Korean and Japanese exchange students in this study are believed to have broadened their perspectives, realizing that they are part of a bigger world. If they did not travel abroad and stayed in their own country, they might have been the frog in a pond. The participants' perceptions of the world have evolved and transformed, understanding differences and on the path of becoming global citizens. The exchange students seemed to have learned to appreciate the people they met and the culture they have experienced. The students that participated in this study were believed to have increased their respect and appreciation for diverse cultures after a semester or yearlong stay in Turkey. However, only time will show the long-term impact of this 'once in a life time' experience.

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