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EXPLORING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' PREFERENCES, EXPERIENCES, AND CAREER GOALS IN TÜRKİYE

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ABSTRACT

There has been a significant increase in international student mobility in the last two decades, thanks to internationalization. International student mobility is becoming essential for scientific, technological, industrial, commercial, and political countries. While this increase made positive contributions to countries and students, on the one hand, it also caused students to encounter different problems. This study aims to investigate the reasons why international students choose Turkey, as well as their experiences and future career plans. This research is a qualitative research approach with a phenomenological design. This qualitative study used a semi-structured interview form as a data collection tool. In the study, it was found that they encountered language and communication barriers supported by the literature. In addition, international students think their education in Turkey will positively affect their future. They state that they can seize new opportunities in other countries thanks to the knowledge and experience they have gained from Türkiye. This study suggests that incorporating international student experiences into the existing body of literature would provide universities and administrators with valuable insights into the factors influencing students' decision to study in Türkiye, their experiences while studying there, and their future career aspirations.

Keywords: Internationalization, international students, higher education, Türkiye

INTRODUCTION

In today's societies, where international competition is gaining importance and spreading rapidly, students need to develop some basic cultural skills to be successful (Cant, 2004). This need of students has led them to seek higher education worldwide, leading to student mobility (Gu & Schweisfurth, 2015). The international mobility of students creates a new market in the world. It has become another important factor in society, creating new dimensions in science, technology, industry, economics, politics, culture, and the world (De Moor & Henderikx, 2013).

International students are more than just a valuable financial resource for universities. Students' different heritages and different perspectives create a cultural transfer to the country where they study. These students can also contribute to the host country in many areas with the new knowledge and experience they bring (Bevis, 2002; Galloway & Jenkins, 2009; Harrison, 2002; Ramachandran, 2011). International students face various challenges socially, psychologically, and academically while the host makes many significant contributions (Bai, 2022). The most common challenges facing international students are adjustment to school, culture shock, language difficulties, and misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication. Loneliness, traditions and values, differences in education systems, adaptation to unusual social norms, eating habits, isolation, language learning, psychological prosperity, family longing, loneliness, alienation, racial discrimination, and financial difficulties are other challenges (Chen, 1999; Church, 1982; Dahlin et al., 2005; Duru & Poyrazlı, 2011; Furnham & Tresize, 1983; Glass & Westmont, 2014; Hirai et al, 2015; Jensen & Jensen, 1983; Khawaja & Stallman, 2011; Kusek, 2015; Leong & Chou, 1996; Lombard, 2014; Ma & Garcia- Murillo, 2017; Matsumoto & Dobs, 2017; Poyrazlı & Lopez, 2007; Sawir et., al., 2008; Sherry et., al., 2010; Tarry, 2011; Taušová et al., 2019; Vitasari et., al., 2010; Williams & Johnson, 2011; Wu et., al. 2015; Yakunina et al. 2013). These difficulties cause students to face academic difficulties, and according to Sidhu et al. (2014), these difficulties affect students' academic success. International students must work harder to become part of the classroom culture (Mestenhauser, 1983).

Developed countries attach great importance to international student mobility and carry out stable and determined policies. These countries regard international students as human resources contributing to economic development and global rivalry. Türkiye is a country that sends many students to foreign countries in this competition but is less preferred by international students (Levent & Karaevli, 2013). At the national level, governments have been developing various policies based on the possible positive outcomes of developing internationalisation in higher education. These possible positive outcomes generally consist of various factors such as attracting more international students, economic gains through international research collaborations of universities, and taking place in international rankings (Bulut-Şahin & Eriçok, 2023). This study aims to investigate the access and opportunities offered by the Turkish higher education system to international students through a qualitative method and to identify the possible obstacles the current education policy brings.

Internationalization and International Students

Internationalization of higher education has become one of the principal trends today (Dady & Sang, 2022). Universities that attach importance to internationalization strategies have achieved innovations intellectually, culturally, and educationally thanks to international students' experiences, different perspectives, and skills (Martirosyan et al., 2019). In addition, international students have become a new resource of financial support for countries (McCrohon & Nyland, 2018). In this way, international student mobility creates a new market and becomes a critical factor for governments, creating new dimensions at the scientific, technological, industrial, business, and political levels. In this context, there has also been engaging in current research on international student mobility. Research has focused on the sociocultural adaptation or acculturation of students (Ozer, 2015; Sumer, 2009; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006); the benefits of acculturation stress (Adelegan & Parks, 1985; Poyrazlı & Lopez, 2007); international student experiences with discrimination (Constantine et al., 2005); Saudi women international students' experiences of microaggression (Azim & Happel-Parkins, 2019); the difficulties, they experience in understanding and participating in faculty members (Wright & Schartner, 2013) and identity conflicts and negotiations (Sung, 2022). Also, there is research studying neo-racism (Lee & Rice, 2007); assimilation (Gong et al., 2021); belonging (Koehne, 2006); and emphasis placed on identity formation (Koehne, 2005).

Due to internationalization, the past two decades have led to a rapid increase in international student mobility around the world (Montgomery, 2010). However, international student mobility in Türkiye and the world causes students to experience different difficulties (Deuchar, 2022). Not awareness other cultural practices, not being able to master the language contexts of the host country, not being comfortable, feeling isolated, and being away from close family and friends trigger the difficulties that international students experience in adapting to their new places (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011). Also, financial concerns (Mori, 2000; Yeh & Inose, 2003) are essential experiences. For example, they may not be able to make enough phone calls with family and friends they miss so much due to financial incapacity, or they may not be able to go to their family as much as the local student commutes to and from their parents (Sherry et al., 2010). Constantine et al. (2004) state that such experiences of international students may cause them to show more physical, social, and psychological problems than local students.

Turkey is a Eurasian country. Some of Turkey's territory is located in Southeast Europe and some in Asia. Therefore, Türkiye is one of the rare countries that has absorbed the characteristics of Eastern and Western cultures. In a country with a population of around 85 million, higher education-based education services are provided by The Council of Higher Education (CoHE). There are about 7 million university students in Turkey. 4% of these students are foreign students, about 300 thousand (CoHE, 2022). Therefore, the number of international students is substantial. When the enrolments to higher education in Türkiye are examined according to the education levels of the students, it is possible to say that master's (7.92%) and doctoral (6.73%) programs have the highest rate. On the other hand, the undergraduate (2.72%) level is the program with the lowest number of international students (TEDMEM, 2022). Therefore, the objective of this study is to examine the factors influencing the selection of Turkey as a destination by international students, in addition to exploring their

experiences and future professional aspirations. In this context, based on our interviews with 16 international students, we have looked for answers to the following questions.

1. Why did international students choose Türkiye?
2. What are the international students' experiences?
3. What are the goals of international students after finishing higher education?

The findings of this study are expected to add to the literature on the motivations, experiences, and future plans of international students considering university options in Türkiye.

METHOD

Research Design

This research is a qualitative research approach with a phenomenological design. The phenomenological design is based on phenomena recognized to exist in reality but does not have in-depth and sufficiently detailed information (Sığırı, 2021). Phenomenological study emphasizes the ordinary meaning of individuals' lived experiences (Creswell, 2016). In phenomenological studies, individuals make sense of experiences and transform experiences into consciousness, both as individual and shared meaning, which are examined with a profound description (Patton, 2014). In the current study, the experiences of international students were examined in detail.

Participants

The research was conducted with international students studying at a state university in Türkiye (7 males; 9 women) who received financial support from their governments in 2022. In the study, maximum diversity sampling, which is one of the purposeful sampling methods, is used. In purposeful sampling, researchers selectively select individuals to learn about or understand the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2016). Within the framework of this purpose, the study participants comprised 16 international students who had studied in the TÖMER (Turkish and Foreign Languages Application and Research Center) in Türkiye for one year and then studied in the undergraduate department for at least one year. On the other hand, participants who came to Türkiye for higher education in 2020 received Turkish preparatory education in TÖMER for one and then continued their undergraduate education by succeeding in the Turkish proficiency exam. Therefore, the study participants received instruction in the Turkish education centre for one year and continued their education for at least one year in their departments.

Table 1. Nationality and Gender Characteristics of Students

Student	Nationality	Gender
IS 1	Afghanistan	F
IS 2	Afghanistan	F
IS 3	Afghanistan	M
IS 4	Azerbaijan	M
IS 5	Azerbaijan	M
IS 6	Azerbaijan	F
IS 7	Azerbaijan	F
IS 8	Palestine	M
IS 9	Palestine	F
IS 10	Iraq	F
IS 11	Iraq	F
IS 12	Kazakhstan	F
IS 13	Kazakhstan	F
IS 14	Pakistan	M
IS 15	Pakistan	M
IS16	Turkmenistan	M

Materials

In this study, we used a semi-structured interview form as a data collection tool. The semi-structured interview approach is supported by qualitative researchers (Schmidt, 2004) since its overall purpose was to understand the interviewees' feelings, beliefs, facts, experiences, perceptions, and thoughts about their perspectives on the phenomenon. In our work, we wanted to contribute to international higher education research in Türkiye and offer a new way to identify and analyze students' experiences. Therefore, participants were encouraged to discuss their personal stories about their decision to study in Türkiye, their experiences and future plans. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and all information was de-identified. The discussions helped to reveal participants' thoughts on decision-making processes regarding various aspects of their experiences, such as their perception and choice of Türkiye as higher education destination, their life experiences before and during higher education, and potential career development. In addition, international students' accounts and interpretations of the events that occurred before and during their time in Türkiye allowed us to understand the students' experiences better.

Data Collection and Analysis

Before starting this study, the researchers received ethical permission from the Ethics Permission Commission. Ethical procedures were discussed before starting interviews with international students. Each participant voluntarily signed a consent form before any data were collected. Before starting the interviews, permission was obtained from the participants for audio recording (Sutton & Austin, 2015). After that, appointments were set up with the students, and the interviews took place in the meeting rooms, with both the researcher and the

interviewers present. The appropriate times for students and researchers were determined in advance and interviews were held at specified times. Afterwards, the researchers transcribed the audio recordings and had them read to the students to ensure the transcription process's reliability and consistency (Golafshani, 2003). Finally, the students and the researchers met again and discussed the texts for misunderstood expressions.

The descriptive analysis technique was used to determine the participants' reasons for choosing universities in Turkey, their experiences, and plans. Descriptive analysis is a qualitative data analysis in which the data obtained are summarized and described according to predetermined themes (Siğrı, 2021). Students' reasons for preference, experiences, and plans were determined as themes. The answers given by the participants were associated with the themes through direct quotations.

The credibility criterion of the research was ensured by the preparation of the interview form, which was prepared as semi-structured, and expert opinion was taken; the participants voluntarily participated in the research and signed the voluntary participation form, the interviews were conducted face-to-face, and the participants' permission was obtained before the audio recording (Siğrı, 2021). The transferability criterion of the research was ensured by selecting maximum diversity sampling, one of the purposeful samplings, and transferring the data faithfully to its nature (Yıldırım ve Şimşek, 2016). The consistency criterion of the research was ensured by the researchers working together continuously in the process, from the creation of the data collection tool to the data analysis and trying to reach consensus when necessary (Siğrı, 2021). In order to ensure the confirmability criterion, the data were reviewed with the researchers, and evaluations were made together (Kumar, 2011).

FINDINGS

We analysed our interviews with international students in three parts. In the first part, we examine why students prefer Turkish higher education. In the second part, we focused on students' experiences before and after coming to Türkiye. Finally, we examined the plans and targets in the third part.

Findings about international student preferences for Türkiye as a study destination

Students prefer Türkiye because of their religious beliefs and culture. Some students chose Türkiye on the advice of their acquaintances. Some students have been placed in the university through companies cooperating with international students. We inquired about the rationale behind international students' decision to choose Turkey and some of the answers are below.

Higher education is crucial for us. I came from Afghanistan. It is not very easy for women to get an education in Afghanistan. Afghanistan desperately needs healthcare workers, especially midwives and obstetricians. The number of female doctors is also limited. There are who training midwives had. Women give birth under challenging conditions. Some die because they do not get the necessary health care. Both the baby and the mother are dying. My mother sent me to get an

education and said you at least save a few women's and children's lives. I had to prefer Türkiye because the country should be Muslim. I need to study and serve my country as a health staff. I need to solve problems. I need to be a medicine. (IS 1)

The findings show that substantial factors such as cultural, historical, religious, and ethnic affinities are very effective in international students choosing Türkiye (Özoğlu, Gür & Coşkun, 2015). They also report that according to Azim and Happel-Parkins (2019), Muslim and international students face many challenges in non-Muslim states to continue their education. In addition, religion is a significant driver for forced internationalization (Ergin & De Wit, 2019). Therefore, international students with similar religions and cultures are considered a reason to study in countries with similar religions and cultures.

For me, higher education is the future. Changing the stance of my respect for myself and people is making it even more meaningful. That is why I want to continue higher education because the world, the future, needs health workers, who are the most essential for human beings. In my country, women are always looked down upon. So I had to study in another country. My preference was more for a profession than a university. I chose this university to get a career. University was not the profession I wanted to be a midwife university. I came after my state regardless of the country. My school is fine. Whether we have teachers or other subjects, Nice is the university I want. (IS 2)

Lei et al. (2021) and Brzezinski (1994) state that political constraints and internal, cultural-personal factors in students' home countries are why students study abroad. Therefore, IS1 and IS2 have chosen to become international students due to Afghanistan's cultural and political reasons. At the same time, they think that health-related departments are also developed in Türkiye.

I did not choose this university and won Bursa Uludağ University. However, the company that sent me here took a large amount of money from us, defrauded us, and sent me to this university. However, I am delighted right now. (IS 4)

We are placed in universities through companies in our country. However, the company I contacted defrauded me. They said they had collaborated with another university, but I went there, and I needed a record there. Then my family met with the company and registered here. (IS 5)

Of the interviewees, IS4 and IS5 reported that they came to the university where they are currently studying by chance. In other studies, it has been reported that students are randomly placed in international schools (Sablina et al., 2018).

I wanted to study in Türkiye. This is because we have a relationship with Türkiye. In addition, Türkiye is the homeland of the Turks. So I will not feel like an outsider here. My reason for choosing this

university was the recommendation of my acquaintances. I took their advice, and I chose them because I thought the city and the university were suitable for me in most subjects. (IS 6)

According to Mazzarol et al. (1996), the general knowledge and awareness level of international students about other countries is one of the reasons students choose a university. In addition, the choice affects students' potential to access general information about countries. Therefore, especially for students who come to Türkiye to study from Turkic Republics such as IS6, it can be said that having information about Türkiye affects their preferences.

I chose this place because my mother wanted me to study abroad. He wanted me to do my higher education abroad. A student of my mother had studied here, and on her recommendation, I followed the applications and came here. I intended to study in Russia, but the tuition fees were costly, and my family could not afford to pay there. That is why I chose this city and this university. Here it is easier to live and cheaper than in big cities. (IS 7)

According to Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), parents' advice and expectations strongly influence how students study abroad. The interviewer, IS7, chose to study overseas at his mother's request.

A teacher at our school announced the YOS (foreign student exam) exam. So I became aware of the exams, and I did. I chose to study in Türkiye myself. I made a choice. I took the YOS exam organized by the Corrupt university. I took the exam and passed. Passing the exam gives me the privilege of being admitted to the university. (IS 8)

Orahoud et al. (2004) found that most students who participated in a study abroad program felt that their international experience made a difference in their career plans. The interviewer considered it a privilege to pass the IS8 exam and to be an international student in Türkiye.

Because of the geographic and psychological location, I attributed being in this city and university. (IS 14)

Rodriguez González et al. (2011) point out that the size of the country, the cost of living, the distance, the educational background, the quality of the university, and the language and climate of the host country are essential determinants. Furthermore, Kahanec and Kralikova (2011) and Mazzarol et al. (1996) also state that environmental factors and geographical proximity constitute a criterion for the selection of international students. Therefore, it is possible to say that Türkiye's geographical location is a centre of attraction for international students.

Findings about the experiences of international students.

We asked international students to talk about their experiences in Türkiye study and during their stay in the country. We tried to determine their views through semi-structured questions. The most common complaint was the challenge of learning the language. The literature also reports that the experiences of international students are focused on language Adaptation to language is one of the difficulties that international students face jointly, as emphasized in many studies (Ibrahim et al., 2013). Again, culture is essential in shaping countries' education systems (Samovar et al., 2016). Therefore, some differences related to culture affect the experiences of students. Since education about socialization and culture affects the self-development processes of students (Ye & Edwards, 2015), they will not leave school as soon as they first come to school. They are likely to form a new identity thanks to the experience they have gained from the new country and brought to themselves. Therefore, it is essential to examine international students' experiences. Some of the interviewees' responses are presented below.

I had some problems when I came here. People were asking me why I came. I was distraught when they asked why I did not study in Afghanistan. Sometimes I wondered if they did not want us. Nevertheless, then I got used to it. If there had been such an education in Afghanistan, I would not have come. It is challenging to study for women there. There is already war. The world is created for all people. It is not what country you are from that matters. Does he want to gain respect? Does he make an effort? Does he want to do his goals by turning the wrong, or is he taking the proper steps on the right path? These are the points that are valued. I miss my family so much, but I made a choice and chose to study in college. I have to put up with what that brings. This is also my country at the moment. I have to keep up with the rules here. I am delighted that learning to gain new experiences is the most critical thing in life. (IS 1)

The lack of understanding of different cultural practices, being unable to control the language contexts of the host country, being uncomfortable, feeling isolated, and being away from immediate family and friends cause international students to struggle to adjust to their new places (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011). One of the interviewees, IS2, talked about their problems.

I felt a bit like a stranger when I arrived because our physical characteristics differed from our race. I always thought that everyone was looking at me and talking about me. Then I saw that it was not. I accepted this situation. I started to get used to the city. Nevertheless, I was still afraid to communicate with people, and of course, I had some language problems when I arrived, and I could not get along with anyone. Finally, I completed the language training at the Turkish Learning Centre. Because I wanted to go to the faculty where I would learn my profession as soon as possible, I could only go to the faculty if I completed the language course. That is why I worked hard. I mainly improved my Turkish by communicating with Turkish friends, and I now understand the lessons. I

can also share with my friends. In addition, I participate in social events organized by the university.

(IS 2)

Research has shown how international students find it challenging to meet the demands of classroom learning, make friends and establish social connections on campus (Sawir et al., 2008; Sherry et al., 2010; Tarry, 2011). As IS 2 explains for international students, participating in extracurricular activities is a valuable opportunity to meet host citizens (Tokoyawa & Tokoyawa, 2002).

People here were strange to us when we first arrived. People living in the city are not used to international students. That is why they were weird at first. However, then they got used to it. I was very unfamiliar with it at first. I miss my family and friends so much. I thought about whether I should leave here and return to my country. I also struggled in classes at first. I had learned Turkish but needed more to learn Turkish when the lessons started. Since it is a department about health, I came across many Latin words and needed help trying to understand the lessons. On the one hand, I am trying to understand the lessons with my Turkish, which needs to be more; on the other hand, new words and new concepts. Ok, but I have many difficulties. I am drowned in homework, forums, and quizzes. (IS 3)

In academia, language barriers can affect writing, presentation comprehension, the content of the exams, asking the teacher about the subject and they do not understand in the classroom. In addition, the student's academic performance may be lower than expected due to cultural stress factors and difficulties adapting to the environment due to the different mother tongue. (Parray, 2020). According to Bai (2022), students have experienced problems due to various and unexpected academic culture and language issues. According to Kondakci et al. (2008), while international students actively participate in the teaching process, they have found that they need help understanding their teaching-learning styles and interaction patterns in the classroom. In our study, the interviewer stated that IS3 needed help getting used to the new teaching methods in the classroom.

My first experience was with food. Since I am a person who loves to eat, I needed help getting used to the different food cultures. I also tried dishes from different cultures but had no problems because my experiments were occasional. I was constantly forced to eat food that did not belong to our culture. When I miss my mother's food, I go to my friends who have a house. I make it from our dishes there. So I both exchange cultures and eat the food I cook one I miss. This strengthens our ties with my friends. Again, one of the problems I experienced when I started was paperwork. We dealt with many documents, the school helped us a lot, and I was always worried that there would be a problem. However, luckily it is over, and it is going smoothly right now. (IS 4)

One of the situations that international students have to deal with is getting used to the new food culture. Making changes in their eating habits while getting accustomed to the new culture is challenging for students (Church,

1982; Furnham & Tresize, 1983; Satia- Abouta, 2003). International students' social integration usually occurs through informal communication (Tinto, 1975). International students spend time socializing with their friends while doing a cultural exchange (Toyokawa & Toyokawa, 2002). As interviewer IS4 points out, it uses cultural exchange through informal communication. IS4 also stated that it struggled with some difficulties with paperwork.

First, if we want to study in another country, we go to consulting companies, and they direct us. I still needed to agree with the company regarding this university. I took the exam at another university. I thought I had won there and been placed there. Then when they had university records, I went to that university, and there were no documents about me in their records. Then we contacted the company, and they told me that I had taken the exam at this university that I would enroll there and that I had won this university. I just stayed in a city I did not know. I immediately moved to this city. I came and registered. I found a place to stay for a few days. I arranged a private dormitory in the city. Then the lessons started here. I immediately began attending classes, but I needed help because everyone started to get together. So I adapted quickly. The paperwork took a challenge. Nevertheless, now everything is fine. (IS 5)

.... I had several difficulties. I had difficulty with the company that referred me here. If companies pay attention to the placement of students, document transactions, and other issues like this, as much as they care about the money they receive, there will be no problem. However, this problem will be solved if the university and international students cooperate. (IS 6)

IS4, IS5, and IS6 Azerbaijani students reported that they had problems with companies that were instrumental in their acceptance, especially in higher education. Some of the literature also highlights how vulnerable international students are to exploitation (Altbach & Teichler, 2001).

Since I started school, I have been fine in the city people and at the university. Everyone behaved very well. There were some difficulties with the paperwork, but then everything was solved. At my mother's request, I wanted to become a teacher. My mother supported me financially, but I lost my mother one month ago. I am having difficulty as a mud. I am married, and I also have children. I miss them very much, but I want to continue my education. My wife also works there and takes care of our child. I am going through a difficult period. I am currently both studying and working. I was staying at home, but I am staying where I work because I cannot afford to pay the rent... (IS 7)

Research shows that international students need help with higher tuition fees and the financial resources to sustain a living in the city (Cadieux & Wehrly, 1986; Khawaja & Stallman, 2011; Mori, 2000; Yeh & Inose, 2003). IS7 reported struggling financially but still wanted to continue his university education. According to Stein and

Andreotti (2016), suitable accommodation, isolation and loneliness, homesickness and lack of social support, and insufficient access to social networks are among the problems experienced by international students.

When I first came here, I had a language barrier. At first, I did not want to communicate with people in public. I was very unfamiliar with the languages. However, as I started to learn, thanks to the Turkish lessons, my confidence came. As a foreigner, you should be ready for some difficulties. I stayed in the city for about two years, and the people in the city are friendly. They are kind and helpful. That is why I do not see anything or encounter anything negative regarding the people of the city. (IS 8)

International students can encounter language difficulties, differences in traditions and values, and homesickness in their countries of origin (Furnham & Tresize, 1983). IS 8 reported that they faced several difficulties when it came to communication. He got used to the city and the people and found them friendly; he reported that:

The first thing people think about me, and the first thing I feel the most, is that I am a stranger and have gender, race, religion, etc. The local people do not like foreigners. Many Iraqi families have come to this city as immigrants and refugees. They thought of us as members of those families when I first arrived. At first, it upset me that they did not know I came here for higher education or that they considered foreigners for other families. I could only focus a little on the lessons. Should I go back? However, I have been given some rights when I think about it and have conversations with my Turkish and local friends here. The economic and social structures of the families who came as asylum seekers or refugees could be a lot higher, they cannot adapt to the culture in the city, and people are uncomfortable with it. So I deserve it. However, when they found out that I was studying at university, local people appreciated it. How hard is life for you? How hard it is to look in another country ... (IS 10)

International students feel very lonely when they get to the beginning of their studentship. Their loneliness stems from separation from their family and friends and a new cultural, social, and foreign language (Sawir et al., 2008). One of the factors affecting the experience of international students living and studying in a new country is how the local people perceive them (Brown & Brown, 2013). The interviewer, IS10, felt that he was lonely, and this feeling prevented him from focusing on school.

First of all, it is not easy to be in a foreign country. I had a hard time getting used to the new culture, but man is a social being and getting used to everything. One of my most challenging issues was translating each document from English into Turkish. This is a highly inadequate and uneducated higher education activity because English is an international language. Since this is higher education, English documents should be accepted. (IS 12)

When I came to Türkiye, I felt deaf and dumb because of the language barrier. The barrier is good enough. Yes, I have experience, and I can say one sentence from my experience " Only the fittest can survive." I am satisfied with the place where I used to live. I cannot feel that I belong here because, sometimes, I am thought by people that I am a foreigner. The first problem has always been the language barrier, and the second problem has always been the intolerable attitude of the concerned department. (IS 14)

Many studies have pointed out that language adaptation is a shared challenge facing international students (Ibrahim et al., 2013). International students in the literature have reported two significant academic challenges: language and academic culture. Language is a substantial barrier for international students (Dai et al., 2018; Furnham & Tresize, 1983; Heng, 2018; Ibrahim et al., 2013; Khawaja & Stallman, 2011; Wu, 2015). Therefore, students who came to Türkiye faced language barriers at first.

Findings about career goals of the international students.

The students who participated in the interviews had been in Türkiye for more than one year. The students had experienced living independently away from their families and homes. They learned Turkish culture and Turkish people. They had dealt with the challenges of a new academic environment and cultural differences. Despite their drawbacks, they were open to development and exposure to new experiences. The students whose plans we asked about emphasized the issues of continuing graduate education in another country, continuing their professions in their own countries, and being helpful to humanity.

Türkiye is an Islamic country and has a friendship with Afghanistan. The education of health departments in Türkiye is outstanding. After finishing here, I will go to Germany for postgraduate studies. Then I want to complete my doctoral studies and return to my country. After that, I want to go to Afghanistan and provide services. In terms of health, Afghanistan is behind. Studying health school abroad is a great advantage for me. It will allow me to get a job quickly. I want to raise resentment, especially in training women students and serving women. My life will be wonderful. I will be handy to people. (IS 1)

Students who choose to go abroad for university education believe they will be more likely to be employed than those who do not (Di Pietro, 2013). IS1 believes he can be easily employed when he returns and thinks his life will be beautiful. IS2 via IS 3 students also believe they can be used when they return home.

Studying in Türkiye is pleasant and meaningful because new ideas have given me a new perspective. In the future, I want to be on the field; many people need us. I do not doubt that my life will be better and more beautiful from now on. I will return to my country and do my profession. (IS 2)

It was always my dream to study at a university abroad. I want to finish my undergraduate education and do a master's degree. Experience abroad will make it easier for me to find a job. We are the wanted employees. I want to return to my hometown later. Then I will start life and hold on slowly. (IS 3)

I am studying English teaching here. After finishing university, I want to go to England, my country my family is engaged in trade. I want to establish a commercial connection between England and my country with my English education here. My family thinks the same way I do. (IS 4)

After finishing this university, I want to go to Germany or Canada. I prefer it to be European Union countries. I want to build on my education there. The fact that they are economically developed makes me think that my life there can be easy. I am fine economically here, but I want to continue my education there and then return to my country and become a researcher. At the same time, I plan to apply for exchange programs next year to see new countries and acquire new cultures. (IS 5)

International students want to expand their careers on a global level. With solid educational foundations and intercultural experiences, they are eager to develop their self-identity and travel to new countries (Wu & Wilkes, 2017). IS4 and IS5 are also among students who want new career experiences in other countries. While international students increase financial income in host countries, they bring a different perspective and cultural awareness to these countries (Bevis, 2002; Harrison, 2002). In addition, countries' climate and lifestyle are important factors that students consider when deciding where to go after graduation (Wu & Wilkes, 2017). In the opinion of IS5, the economic prosperity of countries after graduation guides students' plans. As Findlay et al. (2012) point out, a country's economy can affect students' interest in studying there.

I want to return to my country and do my job. Our country has professional entrance exams, and I will prepare for them. Then I will work for my wife and children. (IS 7)

After finishing my undergraduate, I can continue my master's degree before returning to my country. I am still deciding on that. I can continue my master's degree and then return to my country. Alternatively, I will return immediately after completing my license. However, one thing is for sure: I will return to serve my country after completing my education. (IS 8)

Students, in general, aim to return to their countries. Indeed, Li & Primecz's (2021) studies have also determined that some students focus on their family's desire to return to them and what they want to do for their country. IS7 via IS8 also reported that they wanted to return to their families. In Wu & Wilkes (2017), students who plan to return home also expressed their opinions.

I want to do a master's degree and doctorate at another university and learn about other cultures.

(IS 10)

There is no graduate education in my department at this university. Therefore, after completing my master's degree at another university, I want to return to my country and do my profession. (IS 12)

The only goal for coming to Türkiye was to be graduated. My plan after graduating is to work professionally in some field. After college, I am going to apply for some work. (IS 14)

To be a professional in literature, I want to continue my higher education. (IS 15)

Participants are IS10, IS11, IS12, IS 14, and IS 15 state that they want to continue their education at another university. In other research, some students say they want to continue their education in another country or even work there (Harman, 2003; Nsiri, 2022). In a study by Berriane (2015), a substantial proportion of students said they wanted to continue their education in another country or even work there. Research findings from Li & Primecz (2021) show that students aim to move to a European country to pursue their future careers.

CONCLUSION and DISCUSSION

In this study, adding international student experiences to the literature will help universities and administrators understand the reasons for university preferences, experiences, and career plans of international students. First, this research explains why foreign students are drawn to Türkiye. The reasons students choose Türkiye are affected by geographical location. Studies by Rodriguez González et al. (2011), Kahanec and Kra'liková (2011), and Mazzarol et al. (1996) also support the findings of the current study. In addition, the advice of friends and acquaintances is among the reasons that affect the preference. According to Lei et al. (2021), it supports our findings, emphasizing that students have made choices through their acquaintances. Finally, some come to the university as a coincidence. Similar issues stand out in the literature (Sablina et al., 2018).

The second theme revealed by our study is the experiences of the students. As the literature supports, language and communication are sourced (Dai et al., 2018; Furnham & Tresize, 1982; Heng, 2018; Ibrahim et al., 2013; Khawaja & Stallman, 2011; Wu, 2015). Therefore, we also reached the findings. The problems faced by international students are similar in most cases (Singh, 2021). In addition, the vulnerability of international students to exploitation is an important finding of our study. It was stated that the companies defrauded the interviewees. Studies that also highlight the vulnerability of international students to exploitation (Altbach & Teichler, 2001) support our findings. As Stein and Andreotti (2016) point out, appropriate housing, isolation, and loneliness, homesickness are among the problems experienced by international students. According to Singh (2021), the difficulties experienced by international students make them more resilient and vigorous. Based on the study's findings, we think that international students strive in Türkiye, focus on development, and have a strong persistence that enables them to succeed in education.

When we determined the students' future goals, those who wished to do postgraduate degrees reported that they could study in universities in their own countries and other countries and Türkiye. Another alternative was to return to their homes and do their jobs. Li & Primecz's (2021) studies also found that some students focused on their family's desire to return to them and what they wanted to do for their country. However, the idea of earning a master's or doctoral degree is also appealing to students. In other research, some students say they want to continue their education in another country or even work there (Harman, 2003; Nsiri, 2022). In addition, employers' attitudes toward studying abroad are essential in motivating students to take advantage of the opportunity for an international experience (Trooboff, de Berg & Rayman, 2008).

Due to this rationale, students hold the belief that their educational experience in Turkey will yield beneficial outcomes for their future careers. Every participant expressed that their pursuit of higher education in Turkey was imperative for both personal and professional growth. The individual's acquisition of serious expertise within each of their academic departments, adaptation to a foreign country, attainment of language proficiency, and familiarity with Turkish students and culture were enhanced. As a result of the knowledge and experience acquired in Türkiye, individuals will be presented with fresh prospects in various countries across the globe.

SUGGESTIONS

Our research has some limitations. The study's data were collected from a state university in the Central Anatolia region of Türkiye. In addition, one of our limitations is that the students came to Türkiye as international students from a country in the Asian continent. Students from African countries and other continents were not included in the study. In the study, data were collected only through semi-structured interviews. Collecting data from international students at other small universities in Türkiye is also recommended to test the findings. This research discusses students' reasons for choosing their current university, their experiences when they arrived here, and their plans. Determining their experience after graduation with a longitudinal study is also recommended in future studies.

ETHICAL TEXT

"In this article, the journal writing rules, publication principles, research and publication ethics, and journal ethical rules were followed. The responsibility belongs to the author (s) for any violations that may arise regarding the article. "

As all authors, we accept ethical responsibilities. This study was carried out with the decision of the Ethics Committee of Yozgat Bozok University dated 20.04.2022 and numbered 32/29 and the research permit of Yozgat Bozok University E-26464702-903.99-75531 dated 24.05.2022.

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