Views of International Student Teachers on The Problems They Encountered in Turkey and Suggestions for These Problems[1]

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Abstract

Turkey has become one of the countries where these international students continue their education due to ongoing wars in the surrounding countries and the fact that Turkey is a transit route for refugees. The aim of the present study is to investigate the problems encountered by international student teachers while studying in Turkey and to explore their own solution suggestions to these problems. The study was carried out with five student teachers studying at Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University Faculty of Education, and phenomenological research design, one of the qualitative research methods, was used. The data were collected using a questionnaire with open-ended questions and content analysis method was used for data analysis. The findings of the study showed that the participating student teachers held positive views on the courses and the faculty members, and they held negative views on the quality of education in their respective departments. The participants expressed that they had problems with language and communication, and they were subject to exclusion in their classrooms. Moreover, they emphasized that it was unnecessary for them to take some courses and the attendance at the courses should not be compulsory.

INTRODUCTION

The effects of globalization can be felt in the field of education as in every other field. In recent years, many students around the world prefer to go to developed countries by leaving their families and countries with the purpose of receiving a more quality education. Many developed countries, especially USA and the UK, continue to be the first choice of these international students (Dreher & Poutyaara, 2010; Wu, Garza & Guzman, 2015). Turkey exhibits an upward trend in recent years with the number of international students reaching

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172 thousand. Despite this rising trend, it is seen that the country still has not reached the desired levels in terms of the number of international students (Higher Education Council, 2019). International students make some contributions (economic, cultural dialogue, quality of education, workforce, etc.) to the countries they go to (Lee, Maldonado, & Rhoades, 2006; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), but at the same time, it is known that these students face some problems (adaptation, language, stress, anxiety, isolation, accommodation, financial difficulties, loneliness, communication with faculty members and peers, different academic cultures, etc.) (Bdycott, 2012; Lapitov, Ziyatdinov, Dedimova, Gerasimov, & Zaostroytseya, 2017; Skinner, 2010; Wu, et al., 2015). It is observed that these students, firstly, experience fear and anxiety about their lives in their host countries, then they observe the cultural structures of these countries, and then they experience a culture shock (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987; Huntley, 1993; Shapoval, 2016; Wu et al., 2015). As such, international students in Turkey experience some difficulties in terms of socio-cultural adaptation, accommodation, communication, health services, and educational processes (Özçetin, 2013). It was noticed that international students consider some personal (family, socio-economic status, relatives/friends being abroad etc.) and environmental (security, quality of education, living conditions, scholarship, distance, social opportunities, diploma equivalency, culture, language, religion, history, climate etc.) factors when choosing a country for their education (Kocabıyık, Bacıoğlu, & Güvendir, 2019). In addition to these reasons, it is also known that there are international students who must continue their education in other countries for different reasons. Turkey has become one of the countries where these students (such as Syrian, Afghan and Iraqi) continue their education due to ongoing wars in the surrounding countries and the fact that Turkey is a transit route for refugees (Zavalsız & Gündağ, 2017). It is seen that mostly Syrian students have to continue their higher education in Turkey thanks to ongoing conflicts and war in Syria. According to the statistics of Higher Education Council (2020), Syrian students (121 people) outnumber students from other countries (44 students from Afghanistan and 4 students from Iraq) at Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University. The problems experienced by international students, especially Syrian students, who continue their education in Turkey, have some reflections on both their daily and academic lives. The adaptation process of these students, who had to leave their own country and went through a negative economic and psychological process, becomes more difficult. The most important problems experienced by these students in this process are different culture, financial difficulties, and different language. Their struggle with these problems also negatively affects their academic lives. Gültekin (2015) emphasized that these students' efforts to eliminate the problems they face have direct negative influence on their academic processes. Moreover, Kumcagiz, Dadashzade, and Alakuş (2016) emphasized that these problems prevent students from fully reflecting their real academic capacities. Many studies that deal with international students can be found in the literature (Cura & Işık, 2016; Fischer, 2014; Jourdini, 2012; Korobova, 2012; Sadık, 2017). It is understood that these studies especially focus on international students' problems, adaptations, adaptation processes, and the solution to these issues (Bdycott, 2012; Lapitov et al., 2017; Özçetin, 2013; Wu et al., 2015). It is also seen that there are studies examining international student teachers' perspectives on educational programs (Gökalp, 2012), the problems they face regarding language and education (Kıroğlu, Kesten, & Elma, 2010), and their views on their education in Turkey (Gültekin, 2015). It is noticed that there are limited number of studies focusing on international student teachers attending faculties of education, and the existing studies only focus on the problems these student teachers experience. Thus, it is thought that exploring

the problems faced by these student teachers' and their own solutions to these problems is of vital importance. It is believed that looking at these problems from the perspective of international students and finding more realistic solutions to the problems from their perspective would be meaningful.

On this basis, the aim of the present paper is to;

•explore the problems that international student teachers studying in Turkey face throughout their educational processes,

•investigate solutions to the problems that were suggested by the international student teachers studying in Turkey.

METHODOLOGY

In this study, which aims to determine the views of student teachers on the learning environment, phenomenological design, one of the qualitative research methods, was used. The phenomenological design is used in studies aiming to investigate some phenomena that we are aware of in daily life but do not have in-depth knowledge of. Phenomenology is a pattern used to make sense of and evaluate the essence of the experiences of individuals. In other words, this design strives to learn individuals' experiences about a phenomenon and make them understandable by the readers (Miller, 2003; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013).

Participants

The research was conducted with five Syrian student teachers studying at Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University Faculty of Education during the spring semester of 2016-2017 academic year. The researchers continued to work with student teachers who volunteered to participate in the study considering time and accessibility.Two of the participants were male and three were female. One of the participants was 20 years old, two of them were 21 years old, and the other two were 23 years old. One of the participants was studying at the Psychological Counseling and Guidance department, two of them were studying at the department of Elementary School Teaching, and two of them were studying at the department of K-12 Mathematics Teaching.

Data Collection

The data were collected with a questionnaire with open-ended questions, which was prepared by the researchers. The existing literature on the subject and the views of the experts guided the process of forming the items of the questionnaire. A pilot study was carried out by administering the questionnaire, which was approved by three experts (two of them program development experts and one of them assessment-evaluation expert), to five student teachers studying at the department of elementary school teaching. The final version of the questionnaire was completed after some adjustments were made as a result of the pilot study, and the final version was administered to each student teacher separately in an environment where they could express their opinions freely.

Data Analysis

In phenomenological studies, content analysis is used to reach the themes in a way that the data can explain the phenomenon. The answers to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire were subjected to content analysis after they were transferred to the computer environment without any intervention. The stages of coding the data, finding the themes,

organizing the codes and themes, and defining and interpreting the findings were followed in analyzing the data. Two experts were involved in the process of creating themes, categories, and codes. The experts created the themes, categories, and codes separately. In this process, the points of consensus and disagreement were determined. The coders discussed again the points of disagreement and they reached the consensus on these points at the end. Coder reliability was calculated with the formula of [(Consensus/Consensus + Disagreement) X 100] (Huberman & Miles, 2002) in this study. The coder reliability for this study was calculated as 84%. To ensure the validity of the research, the findings are presented without making any comments, often with direct quotations. While making direct citations, codes of IST1, IST2… IST5 were given to international student teachers.

FINDINGS

The findings of the research are shown in tables with themes, categories, and codes. The views of the student teachers were shown in each table, so that the readers can interpret the tables easily based on the raw data.

Views on the Teacher Training System in Turkish Higher Education

The views of the student teachers regarding the teacher training system in Turkish higher education, which is within the scope of the first question in the research, are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Views on the Teacher Training System in Turkish Higher Education

Theme	Category	Codes	Views of the Student Teachers
Turkish Higher Education	Positive	Courses (1)	*I think that the teacher training system in the Turkish higher education system is very successful. The courses are taught very well. Student teachers also have the practicum opportunity, and this is a very good experience.* IST3
		Faculty and Peers (2)	*The faculty helps us throughout our education, we have a good communication with our friends, and when we have problems, both the faculty and our friends help us.* IST5 *If we compare Turkey with Syria, the education system and teachers in Turkey are better. Teachers treat students well.* IST4
	Negative	Poor education (2)	*I think that there are problems with teacher training in the Turkish higher education system because the training is not given properly. We are just studying for the grades. I think we will have a lot of problems when we become teachers.* IST2

When Table 1 is examined, it is seen that the views of student teachers under the theme of Turkish higher education are shown within the scope of positive and negative categories. It is understood from the table that the student teachers hold positive views on courses, faculty members, and peers. Moreover, it can be noticed that student teachers also hold negative views on Turkish higher education, expressing that the training given is grade-oriented and that proper education is not given.

Views on the Problems Experienced During the Process of Education

Within the scope of the second research question, the views of the student teachers on the problems they experience during the processes of education and training are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Views on the Problems Experienced During the Process of Education

Theme	Category	Codes	Views of the Student Teachers
Problems experienced during the process of education	Problems on the process of instruction	Problems on the courses (1)	*I must take the courses of History of Turkish Revolution and Turkish language although I am a foreigner, and I am studying at the mathematics department.*IST2
		Problems on attendance (1)	*I'm having trouble with absenteeism. If attendance becomes noncompulsory, I will go to classes more comfortably. The obligation puts me off from attending classes.* IST1
	Social Problems	Problem of exclusion (1)	*When we were told, "Syrians take our rights and come to university without an exam," in the classroom or in general, we had problems. When groups were formed in the classroom, we were always excluded, or the teacher had a hard time placing us in groups. We were always far away from everyone just because we were foreigners… I started to encounter bigger problems: both the dormitory problem and the school problem.* IST4
		Problems of Communication and Language (2)	*I don't understand when our teachers talk fast. I can't communicate well with my teachers.* IST3 *When we first came to the class and did not understand the topic, we could not inform the teachers about this situation because we were afraid that the teacher would not understand our speech.* IST5

When Table 2 is examined in detail, it is seen that within the scope of the problems experienced during the process of education theme, there are two categories named problems on the process of instruction and social problems. Regarding the process of instruction, the participating student teachers expressed that taking some courses (Turkish History of Revolution and Turkish Language) is unnecessary for them and that attendance should not be compulsory. They also emphasized that they were subject to exclusion in their classrooms, and they had problems with communicating with others and language. Moreover, the participants complained about the obligation to attend classes saying that this obligation puts him off from attending classes, and that they had difficulty in getting into study groups in the classroom just because they were foreigners.

Views on Suggestions for Solutions to the Problems Experienced During the Process of Education

Within the scope of the third research question, Table 3 shows the solutions suggested by the participating student teachers to the problems they experienced during their education in Turkey.

Table 3. Views on Solution Suggestions for the Problems Experienced During the Process of Education

Theme	Category	Codes	Views of the Student Teachers
Solution Suggestions for Problems	Institutional Dimension	Guidance (1)	*A person responsible for foreigners should be appointed, such as a counselor, who listens to our problems and can help us.* IST1
		Courses (1)	*If I had different opportunities, I would take courses and lessons that can be beneficial to foreign students, so I can develop myself more.* IST5
	Faculty Dimension	Motivation (1)	*We hope that teachers will be more interested in students. They must verbally motivate foreign students.* IST3
	Individual Dimension	Personal Effort (2)	*I must deal with the problems patiently.* IST5 *I am trying to solve my problems with my own efforts.* IST2

When Table 3 is examined, the views of the student teachers are discussed under the theme of solution suggestions for problems. The participating student teachers' views are grouped under three categories: individual dimension, faculty dimension, institutional dimension. Emphasizing that there should be a counseling service that can listen to their problems and produce solutions within the institutional structure, the student teachers

emphasized that it would be beneficial to organize various courses for them within this framework. It is understood that the student teachers underlined that faculty members should display more sensitive and motivating behaviors towards themselves, and that their individual efforts are also important in solving the problems.

Views on the Hopes for the Profession

Within the scope of the fourth research question, the views of the student teachers on their hopes regarding the teaching profession are given in Table 4.

Table 4. Views on the Hopes for the Profession

Theme	Category	Codes	Views of the Student Teachers
Hopes for the profession	Hopes for the academia	Graduate Education (2)	*I'm thinking of doing a master's after graduation. After that, I want to be a good psychological counselor, of course, if the situation improves in my own country, because my country needs us now.* IST1
			I want to pursue MA degree after graduation and improve myself. If possible, I would like to get a doctorate education and bring up teachers in my own country. IST3
	Hopes for the teaching profession	Being a good teacher (3)	*I want to be a good teacher. I also want my life and my family's life to be good.* IST5
			I want to be a good teacher so that I can bring up good students. I want to work in my own country. IST2
			If I become a teacher, I want to improve myself and do my job properly. IST4

It is seen that the student teachers' views on the hopes for the profession are dealt with under two categories: hopes for the teaching profession and hopes for the academia. The student teachers' views show that they wish to continue their postgraduate education with a master's or doctorate after graduation; and that they have hopes of becoming a qualified teacher by educating themselves well in the professional sense. From the statements of the student teachers, it is understood that they have hopes of returning to their country by achieving a good academic and professional development, raising qualified teachers in their countries, and contributing to their families economically.

CONCLUSION, DISCUSSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

In this study, it is aimed to determine the problems encountered by international student teachers studying in Turkey during their education and explore their own solution suggestions for these problems. The findings revealed that the participating student teachers

hold both positive and negative views on Turkish higher education system. They expressed that the classes are conducted properly and successfully, and that the university gives them the opportunity of practicum, which would be a valuable experience. They also stated that the attitudes and behaviors of the faculty members and their peers towards them reduced the problems they experienced. It is seen that these findings also overlap with the findings of Gültekin (2015), Kıroğlu, Kesten and Elma (2010), and Çöllü and Öztürk (2009). In addition to these positive views, it is noticed that some student teachers emphasized that Turkish higher education is a grade-oriented and unqualified education system and that they may experience great difficulties when they become teachers. Another finding of the study showed that the participating student teachers were having some problems with the process of instruction and social life. Regarding the social problems, the participants stated that they experienced exclusion just because they were foreigners. Moreover, they had problems with communication and language and accommodation. The student teachers asserted that they were being looked at differently by their peers, they were excluded, they could not communicate well with the faculty members, and they had problems with the language. They emphasized that especially having language problems caused communication problems and this situation negatively affected their academic achievement. These findings of the present paper overlap with the findings of Bodycott (2012), Gültekin (2015), Jourdini (2012), Özçetin (2013), Sadık (2017), and Şahin and Demirtaş (2014). In addition to these findings, it is seen that the participating student teachers stated that there should be no obligation to attend classes, and they also expressed that it is unnecessary for them to take some courses (History of Turkish Revolution and Turkish Language). Another finding of the study shows that student teachers offer some solutions for the problems they experience. It is understood that the student teachers, who stated that some special and specific courses could be organized for them, emphasized the need for counselors to be responsible for them and offered some solutions at the institutional level. The student teachers emphasized that there should be a counseling service that can listen to their institutional problems and support them in solving these problems. The student teachers indicated that courses could be organized at their university for language learning and other activities, and that the problems they experienced could be solved with the close attention and verbal motivation of the faculty members. It is seen that there are many studies in the literature that support these findings (Kocaabıyık et al., 2019; Seydi, 2014; Vershinina, Kurbanov, & Panich, 2016; Wu et al., 2015). Shapoval (2016) emphasized in his research that the motivation of international students should be ensured during the process of adaptation to the countries they go to, and the family members have an important responsibility at this point. Skinner (2010) concluded in his research that several activities should be carried out to ensure the adaptation process of new international students coming to England. In addition to these findings, it is seen that some student teachers choose the way of solving their problems with their personal efforts, that is, they follow an individual path. The last finding of the study revealed that the participating student teachers expressed their hopes and dreams about the teaching profession within the scope of pursuing a graduate education after graduation and being a good teacher. They stated that they wanted to pursue master's degree or doctorate degree after graduation, and in this way, they would like to bring up teachers in their own country. Moreover, they indicated that they wanted to be a good teacher so that they can bring up their students properly. They also underlined that they wanted to constantly improve themselves individually and professionally.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations can be made:

• Counseling services can be established in universities to support student teachers in finding solutions to the problems they encounter.

• Extracurricular courses can be organized to support student teachers' problems regarding the language and academic achievement.

• Faculty members can be encouraged to motivate and encourage student teachers throughout their education at universities.

• Longitudinal studies can be conducted on the problems experienced by student teachers.

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