



## An Examination of Abroad Experienced Students' Coping Strategies

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### Abstract

The aim of the study was to analyse the problems of abroad experienced university students after returning to Turkey and the coping strategy that they use for these problems have been examined according to the factors such as gender, age and duration of the abroad experience. The participants were 102 abroad experienced students (45 female; 57 male); studying in a university in Ankara Turkey who participated in the study as volunteers. To collect data; Personal Information Form and Coping Questionnaire (Aysan, 2003) were used. Analysis of data by the independent samples t-test, one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) technique was used. Analyzing data is made on computer. The results of the study are that abroad experienced students, who returned to Turkey from abroad, have problems of academic success, problems with their families and friends and problems of future life. The findings show that the length of the abroad life has a determining role on the selection of the coping strategies adapted by them.

**Keywords:** Return migration, Problems, Coping, Coping strategies, Counseling, Turkish migrants.

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### Contribution of this paper to the literature

This paper contributes to the existing literature by examining abroad experienced students' coping strategies. This study was researched because the number of studies investigating the problems and coping strategies of return migration of the abroad experienced Turkish students was insufficient.

## 1. Introduction

Work migration from Turkey to Germany started in the early 1960s (Razum, Sahin-Hodoglugil, & Polit, 2005). Effecting date of "The Exchange Agreement for Turkish and German Workers" dated October 31, 1961, which was signed with the Government of Federal Germany, is generally accepted as the starting time when large groups of Turkish workers went to the countries in Western Europe to work. This bilateral agreement signed with Germany was followed by many agreements, which were signed to regulate the terms for the exchange with various countries. Among them were the agreement with Austria, Belgium and Holland in 1964, the agreement with France in 1965 and those with Australia and Sweden in 1967 (Cetin & Ercan, 2008; Doğan, 1988).

In the 1960s and 1970s, hundreds of thousands of Turkish workers migrated to Germany. Some settled there, others returned to Turkey after a few years. As of 1982 the countries that demanded labor encouraged the Turkish workers to return to Turkey. In 1983, the German government offered financial incentives for a return to Turkey, and the Turkish population in Germany declined, albeit only temporarily (Razum et al., 2005).

In recent years, Turkish workers have had a tendency to return to Turkey and have started to send their children for education in Turkey (Cetin & Ercan, 2008; Sahin, 2001; Yasa, 1979).

Return was rarely based on purely economic or health-related motives; value-oriented and emotional themes almost always played a role (Razum et al., 2005).

Their return that started as of 1973 tended to increase over years and it reached its peak in 1983-1990, many people returned to Turkey. Returns are continuing although their rate is not as high as that of 1983-1990 (Cetin & Ercan, 2008).

Return migration remains a dynamic process: every year, about 40.000 Turks return from Germany to Turkey; unfortunately, there is not exact information as to the number of people who have returned to Turkey up to now (Federal Statistical Office, 2001).

As these immigrants are a group that is difficult to trace and contact, little is known about their actual reasons for return (Razum et al., 2005).

In the last years, returns have tended to increase, families most of the times do not confer with their children before returning to Turkey, and they believe that it is to their advantage. On the other hand, it is suggested that the youngsters who are forced to return to Turkey have a resistance not to leave their familiar environment, which results in intra-family conflicts, escaping from the house even committing a suicide. Teacher - student relations, disciplinary understanding and practices in the countries in which they lived before are quite different from those in Turkey. Some of these children were born and raised in a foreign country; some of them were born in Turkey and went abroad to their families at their school ages or the age about it. It is expected that the type of the difference may lead to problems and adaptation difficulties (Doğan, 1988; Esentürk-Ercan, 2004).

The researches carried out in Turkey about the students who returned from abroad suggest that they have adaptation problems, problems with their families and friends, problems of academic success, depression, anxiety and the like (Doğan, 1988; Esentürk-Ercan, 2004; Kuruuzüm, 2002).

Research findings about return migration show that the longer one remains in the host culture, the more difficult the reentry process will be (Bennett, McKnight, & Passin, 1958; Esentürk-Ercan, 2004).

For the students who have adapted themselves to the education system of the country in which they live, adapted some values and norms of that society the returning means a new migration. Therefore they have to cope with the problems again that they experienced when they first went abroad (Cetin & Ercan, 2008; Esentürk-Ercan, 2004; Kuruuzüm, 2002).

Specialists use the term "discordant" for the youngsters who do not integrate themselves to the European culture and become alienated gradually in their own country and point out that they are subject to the risk for their psychological health (Esentürk-Ercan, 2004).

According to some inter-cultural studies carried out on this subject the "Returning" is far more difficult than going to a foreign country and entails a longer adaptation period. The cultural shock is accepted as normal while the returning shock is generally not recognized. Culture shock, as a phenomenon, is well documented in the literature (Esentürk-Ercan, 2004; Sahin, 2001).

However relatively little research has been done on cultural shock resulting from reentry into one's home country following a sojourn abroad (Christofi & Thompson, 2007).

Seiffge-Krenke (1990) compared the coping styles of 353 German and 187 Israeli adolescents, aged 15-17 years. The results of the study show, coping behavior among German adolescents was more influenced by situational demands, with pronounced approach-avoidance behavior. The Israeli adolescents showed less variability in coping behavior across situations, laid greater stress on cognitive factors, and showed a striking decrease in overall coping behavior with increasing age.

The results of Gama and Pedersen (1977) show that Brazilian women had more reentry problems than Brazilian men did after living in the United States.

The findings of another study show that women were significantly more satisfied than men upon return to their home culture (Rohrlich & Martin, 1991).

Christofi and Thompson (2007) investigated the structure of the experience of people who returned home after studying abroad, results of the study show that they became disillusioned with their home country and returned to their sojourn country.

Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) reported that older returnees had less difficulty readjusting than did younger returnees. Gullahorn and Gullahorn also found that students who returned from Europe faced less dissatisfaction

on their return home than did those who sojourned in countries very different from their home (cited in [Christofi and Thompson \(2007\)](#)).

[Martin \(1984\)](#) found that relationships with friends were affected negatively, which influenced reentry adjustment. In addition, research supports the hypothesis that individuals who adapt most successfully overseas have a more severe reentry adjustment problem than those individuals who do not adapt overseas ([Brein& David, 1971](#); [Brislin, 1981](#); [Hara, 1984](#); [LaBrack, 1983](#); [Smith, 1975](#); cited in [Christofi and Thompson \(2007\)](#)).

[Mudra \(2008\)](#) investigated "A Study of Perceived Stress, Impact and Coping Strategies" in India with the purpose to investigate stress sources, its impact and coping strategies in rural youth. Findings showed that males were using above said coping strategies more frequently than females. Similarly stress was divided into seven subclasses based on the type of problems faced by respondents i.e. work related stress, family related stress, relationship related stress, financial stress, personal stress, bereavement stress, migration stress.

[Tam and Lam \(2005\)](#) compared stress and coping among 243 migrant and 750 local-born Chinese adolescents in Hong Kong. Findings showed that compared to their local-born counterparts, migrants showed no difference in perceived stress, whereas they were less likely to use withdrawal coping and showed higher self-esteem and less delinquent behavior. Adjustment of migrant adolescents was related to the father's education level and years of residence in Hong Kong.

[Kung, Castaneda, and Lee \(2004\)](#) analyzed a sample of 159 Americans from low socio-economic stratum, the immigrants (N=84) showed a slightly lower depression level, though statistically nonsignificant, when compared with the native born (N=75). The immigrants showed signs of resilience as they were significantly more likely to be employed, had higher income, and experienced less stress but comparable social support. For both groups, higher stress and passive coping significantly predicted higher depression level. Total social support, active coping and younger age also significantly ameliorated depression for the native born. Among the various types of stress and social support, only family related sources were significant in predicting depression, indicating the impact of familism on Mexican Americans.

Migrants in a new destination are prone to vulnerabilities like financial difficulties, difficulty in adjustment to new ecological, socio-cultural and political contexts ([Adhikari & Gurung, 2009](#)). [Brusle \(2008\)](#) claims that migrants adopt both coping strategies as well as accumulative strategies in managing such problems.

The results of research findings about return migration show that the reentry process is difficult than entry to a foreign country.

Psychological counseling and guidance services are of much importance for abroad experienced students to adapt themselves to and interact with the Turkish society and the education system in a fitting way. In order to organize and maintain the psychological counseling and guidance services in the schools for the students who returned from abroad it is essential to determine their needs and problems.

The aim of this study was to analyze the problems of abroad experienced students after return from abroad and the coping strategy that they use for these problems.

The following questions will to be answered in this study:

1. What are the problems of abroad experienced students after return from abroad?
2. Do the coping strategies that are used by abroad experienced students for their problems vary according to gender?
3. Do the coping strategies that are used by abroad experienced students for their problems vary according to age?
4. Do the coping strategies that are used by abroad experienced students for their problems vary according to the length of the period in which they lived abroad?

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Sampling Participants

The participants were 102 abroad experienced students (45 female; 57 male) studying in a university in Ankara Turkey who participated in the study as volunteers. Their ages range from 19 to 25. Most of them lived 10 and more years abroad.

### 2.2. Instruments of Data Collection

Coping Strategy Scale and Personal Information Form that have been prepared by the researcher have been used for the subjects in order to determine the methods that are used to deal with the problems.

In the introduction part of the Coping Strategy Scale, the problem areas have been asked open ended to explain the problems that disturbed those most. Thus, the problem areas of the students have been determined through the content analyses of the problems written in the introduction of the Coping Strategy Scale.

Short descriptive information has been given below about the Coping Strategy Scale. In the research, coping strategies; the scale that has been developed by [Amirkhan \(1990\)](#) and adapted into Turkish by [Aysan \(2003\)](#) have been evaluated through the Coping Strategy Scale about which the validity and reliability work has been carried out. The Coping Strategy Scale has three sub-scales : problem solving, seeking social support and abstaining. Each sub-indicator is measured with 11 coping expressions and total number of the expressions in the indicator is 33.

It has three subscales. The findings about the point invariability and work consistency of the sub-indicators of the Coping Strategy Indicator suggest that the scale is highly reliable ([Aysan, 2003](#)).

### 2.3. Data Analysis

Data has been analyzed at two stages. At the first stage, the most encountered problem areas have been determined. To this end, content analysis has been carried out. At the end of the analysis three categories have been formed in accordance with the content similarities of the problems described by the student. The following names have been given to these categories according to the contents of the problems forming the category:

1. Problems concerning the school life (26.5%).
2. Problems concerning families and friends (38,2%).

3. Problems concerning the future life (35,3%).  
Each category can also be named as the "problem area".

At the second stage, analysis of data by t test, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) technique was used, after variance analysis the Scheffe test has been carried out determine whether the strategies that are adapted by abroad experienced students to cope with the three problem areas vary according to gender, age, the length of abroad period (variance analysis) and determine which group the difference results from when the impact is found considerable.

### 3. Findings

The findings of the study that has been carried out so as to determine the effects of some variables on the coping strategy that are used by abroad experienced students for the problems are given below:

As you see in the Table 1, the gender factor doesn't have an effect on the difference of the coping strategies of abroad experienced students ( $p > 0.05$ )

**Table-1.** Averages concerned with the genders of abroad experienced students and their coping strategies, means, standard deviations and results of the T-Test

Coping Strategy	Gender	n	$\bar{X}$	s.d.	t
Social support	Female	45	22,682	,4158	,44
	Male	57	22,298	,4480	
Problem solving	Female	45	23,056	,6137	,1,48
	Male	56	21,220	,6569	
Abstaining	Female	45	17,293	,5428	,1,62
	Male	57	19,378	,7036	

Note:\* $p < 0.05$

As you see in the Table 2, the age factor doesn't have an effect on the difference of the coping strategies of abroad experienced students. ( $p > 0.05$ ).

**Table-2.** Averages concerned with the ages of abroad experienced students and their coping strategies, means, standard deviations and results of the variance analysis.

Coping Strategy	Age	n	$\bar{X}$	S.D.	t
Social support	19-21	24	22,875	,4703	1,405
	22-24	26	22,978	,4519	
	25 more	31	21,387	,3612	
	Total	101	22,465	,4326	
Problem solving	19-21	24	21,007	,5949	:849
	22-24	46	21,793	,6611	
	25 more	31	23,199	,6491	
	Total	101	22,038	,6414	
Abstaining	19-21	23	18,379	,5597	:395
	22-24	47	17,969	,5920	
	25 more	31	19,296	,7773	
	Total	101	18,470	,6440	

Note:\* $p < 0.05$

As you see in the Table 3 and Table 4, the coping strategies of abroad experienced students vary according to the length of their abroad lives as far as the results of the variance analysis are concerned. ( $p < , 05$ ) The Sheffe test has been carried out to understand the difference in the groups. The difference between the points given to the sub-indicator of the social support of the coping strategies is  $p < , 05$ .

**Table-3.** Averages concerned with the length of abroad period of abroad experienced students and their coping strategies, means, standard deviations.

Coping Strategy	Length of Abroad period	n	x	S.D.
Social support	1)1-8 years	25	26,680	,3637
	2) 9-17	51	21,275	,3400
	3)18 + more	25	20,680	,3976
	Total	101	22,465	,4326
Problem solving	1)1-8 years	25	16,700	,4273
	2) 9-17	50	25,100	,5768
	3)18+ more	26	21,282	,5832
	TOTAL	101	22,038	,6414
Abstaining	1)1-8 years	25	18,982	,3030
	2) 9-17	50	16,400	,6637
	3)18+ more	26	21,958	,7017
	Total	101	18,470	,6440

Note:\* $p < 0.05$

According to the results of the Scheffe test conducted, there is a difference between the group of 1-7 years, that of 9-17 years and that of 18 and more.

**Table-4.** Results of the variance analysis concerned with the length of abroad period of abroad experienced students and their coping strategies.

Coping Strategy	Variance Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig	Scheffe Test
Social	Between groups	5,961	2	2,980	22,908	1000	2-Jan
Support	Within groups	12,756	98	,130			3-Jan
	TOTAL	18,711	100				
Problem Solving	Between groups	11,960	2	5,980	20,080	1000	2-Jan
	Within groups	29,185	98	,298			3-Jan
	TOTAL	41,145	100				3-Feb
Abstaining	Between groups	5,371	2	2,686	7,291	1000	3-Feb
	Within groups	36,099	98	,368			
	TOTAL	41,470	100				

Note: \*p<0.05

The difference between the points given to the sub-indicator of the problem solving of the coping strategies is  $p < .05$ . According to the results of the Scheffe test conducted, there is a difference between the group of 1-7 years, that of 9-17 years and that of 18 and more.

#### 4. Discussion

In this study, the coping strategies of abroad experienced students who returned from abroad to Turkey have been examined according to the factors such as gender, age and length of the abroad period.

The findings of the research show that 26,5 % of abroad experienced students have problems with the school, 38,2 % of them problems with families and friends and 35,3 % of them problems with the future life. These findings support the conclusions of Tam and Lam (2005) and Seiffge-Krenke (1990) 's work and Razum et al. (2005). Findings show that among migrants, future-related problems are often perceived as the most stressful. Being different from other studies (Tam & Lam, 2005) which were carried with the return migrants, the findings of the present study show that gender and age do not have a determining role on the selection of the coping strategies used by abroad experienced students.

According to the findings, 17,6 % of the students returned to Turkey in 1997; 16,7% of them in 1998; 15,7 % of them in 1995; 13,7 % of them in 1994, 8,8 % of them in 2000 and the others returned after 1985. Research findings show that the length of the abroad life has a determining role on the selection of the coping strategies adopted by them.

Along with this, findings also show that the abroad experienced students who lived 1-8 years abroad, prefer the social support seeking strategy among the sub-indicators of the coping strategies; the abroad experienced students who lived abroad for 9-17 years prefer the problem solving strategy among the sub-indicators of the coping strategies and those who lived abroad for 18 or more years prefer the abstaining strategy among the sub-indicators of the coping strategies. These findings support the conclusions of Magnusson (1981) and Doğan (1988).

A similar observation was reported in Wong (1999) study on Chinese youth in Canada in which the greater the acculturation, the more likely the youth were to have problems.

Tam and Lam (2005) reported that migrants who had lived in Hong Kong for a longer period of time resembled local-born youth in that they had lower self-esteem and higher incidence of delinquent behavior than the recent arrivals, indicating negative assimilation to the new social environment.

It has been seen in this study that, which lived abroad for a long time have more adaptation problems after return to homeland.

#### 5. Conclusion

When examining the findings of the research in general, the following results and recommendations have been determined:

1. It can be suggested that although a long time has passed since the abroad experienced students returned to Turkey, they are still not adapted to the new environment and affected negatively by it.
  2. In addition to the problems of abroad experienced students with the school life and their future life, they are faced with problems mostly in their family and friendship relations. This result is also consistent with the research findings in the literature.
  3. It is recommended that this research be made more widely and on more students who experienced abroad life. In such a research, half-structured questions allowing the students to describe their problems can be used.
  4. The psychological counseling and guidance services should be organized very well to help; experienced advisers who have inter-cultural counseling abilities should be employed in these units. Results of the study are important for effective guidance by psychological counseling services.
- To this end, Psychological Counseling and Guidance divisions in the universities put "Inter-cultural Counseling" lessons in the graduate, post-graduate and doctorate studies.
5. Experimental researches on the effectiveness of techniques such as group guidance and behavior shaping should be made to help to solve the adaptation problems of abroad experienced students within the shortest time possible.

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