



## **Investigation of the Turkish Cultural Adaptation of International Students Living in Turkey**

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**Abstract:** In this study, the cultural adaptations of international students studying in Samsun in acculturation processes were examined. The cultural problems that international students inevitably face affect their adaptation to the countries they host. To investigate the effects of the international students' some variables on the cultural adaptation in the context of Turkey constitutes the main objective of this study. In the study, it was examined whether the cultural adaptation levels of international students vary according to gender, place of residence, academic achievement level, education level, faculty they attend, and their age. Within the scope of the research, 670 foreign students participated in this study. According to the research results, the general adaptation level of the students is medium. While the participants' age is a factor affecting cultural adaptation, the students' cultural adaptation does not change according to their gender, place of residence, level of education, academic performance, and the faculties they attend.

**Keywords:** *Academic Achievement; Adaptation Problems; Cultural Difference; Foreign Student*

### **Introduction**

Today, with the effect of globalization and internationalization, people prefer to study in countries outside the country's borders. Now the numbers in this area have increased significantly. According to the results of the research conducted jointly with British Council, IDP Education and UK universities, it is predicted that the international mobility, which was 2.1 million in 2003, will be approximately 5.8 million in 2020 (Böhm et al., 2004). The number of international and foreign tertiary students has grown on average by 4.8% per year between 1998 and 2018 (OECD, 2020). Until recently, a substantial number of foreign, international students attracted predominantly Anglo-Saxon countries such as the U.S., UK or Australia (Rienties & Tempelaar, 2013). More recently, foreign students are also increasingly drawn by non-English speaking countries such as Germany and the Netherlands (Rienties et al., 2012; Rienties & Tempelaar, 2013), South Korea (Shin & Lee, 2021) and Turkey (Snoubar & Celik, 2013).

The wide spectrum of studies has shown that major cultural variations occur within limited geological environments (Rienties & Tempelaar, 2013). This is an inevitable problem for students who go to a different country. When we look at history, people from different cultures have always been in contact and therefore have experienced processes of cultural interaction. Based on this main idea, in addition to many collaborations signed and made between states, mutual cultural, education and student exchange agreements have also been signed with each other. International students constitute an important part of the education market within the general market understanding that emerged as a result of globalization (Kiroğlu et al., 2010). The cultural problems that international students inevitably face

affect their adaptation to the countries they host. To investigate the effects of the international students' some variables on the cultural adaptation in the context of Turkey constitutes the main objective of this study. In the study, firstly, a literature review regarding the related concepts will be presented.

## **Literature Review**

### **Culture**

Culture is a very broad and meaningful concept. This very meaningful and broad framed structure shows that culture consists of many different components. The world of culture covers all kinds of beliefs, behavior patterns and various behaviors (Spencer-Oatey, 2012). This helps all people continue their lives and at the same time continues to improve themselves by taking advantage of foreign students. Surface culture can be described as anything which forms an individual's whole lifestyle, including food, clothing, music, entertainment, and so forth. Deeper culture consists of practices and rituals, perceptions, convictions, values and attitudes (Byram, 1989). The whole family of customs, customs and traditions, which are certain behavioral patterns and social habits that directly affect people's emotions and beliefs, are called "rooted cultural elements". Culture has been explained by philosophers, sociologists, authors, scientists and many more from past to present. Therefore, many definitions of culture have emerged. The first person is systematically investigating the concept of culture in Turkey Ziya Gokalp (Arslan, 2012). According to Gökalp, culture is an institution that connects all members of the society and creates solidarity among them. Expressing culture as national and civilization internationally, Gökalp defines culture as "the mind of a single nation, a harmonious whole of its religious, aesthetic, moral, legal, linguistic and economic lives". All of these institutions constitute the culture of the society(Gökalp, 1994).

### **Culture Shock**

According to Oberg (1954), culture shock is defined as the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. Every society has its own culture. Naturally, the transition from one culture to another creates a problem of adaptation. When entering different cultures, students may experience psychological and adaptation problems. When students adapt to the new culture they have entered, all of the problems, troubles and depressions they face and their reactions are called "Culture Shock". This concept reveals the cultural problems people experience with their own culture in foreign countries. In such an environment, the person experiences physiological and psychological problems. While trying to adapt to the suddenly changing environment, the person struggles with problems such as anxiety, not giving importance to everything, feeling secluded (Güçlü, 1996).

### **Cultural Adaptation**

Adaptation is accepted as a continuous process of adjusting and handling stress at different levels (Y. Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping, et al., 2008).

The biggest adaptation problem for international students stems from cultural differences (Çetin et al., 2017; Gebru & Yuksel-Kaptanoglu, 2020). The difference between the society in which a person grew up and the culture he / she

has and the society and culture in the country he / she went to has the most important place. Psychological adjustment shows the emotional side of adaptation, socio-cultural adaptation its behavioral aspect, and economic adjustment contributes to the effective life of the individual's job (Şeker, 2015). Zhou et al. (2008) associated the adaptation of foreign students with the acculturation model. They stated that there are three dimensions (Social and behavioral adaptation, Affective adaptation, and Cognitive adaptation) in the application of the acculturation model to international students.

### **Turkish Culture**

What sets one nation apart from another is its culture. The main element of culture is its traditions. Some of the traditions of the Turkish society are its language, religion, art and state-building tradition. The Turkish nation, who has been in different communities throughout history, can preserve their culture, although they are in various communities in other geographies. Turkish sociologist Gökalp (1994) is one of the first local sources we can refer to. According to that; The social institutions of the Turkish nation are lives related to religion, language, morality, law, philosophy, reason, aesthetics and economy. Nation is a community of people with a unique culture. Therefore, Turks can have only one language and one culture. The three main groups of the communities that make up the Turkish nation are as follows:

- 1-Oguz Turks (Turkey, Azerbaijan, Iran)
- 2-Harzem Countries (Tekeler, Sarılar, Karakalpaklılar)
- 3-Yakut, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Kipchak, Tatars.

### **Culture and Education Relationship**

Senemoğlu (2004) sees education as a process of nurturing an individual's personality or investing in human capital. Based on the definition, it can be argued that education is one of the most important means of transferring the filtered values, knowledge and skills of the society, namely social heritage, to a new generation. On the other hand, as Fidan and Erden (1994) stated, education is the culturing process of the individual. It is acculturation, which means that the cultural values accumulated and developed from generation to generation are adopted by individuals and that the individual reaches the competence to contribute to their development (Başaran, 1992). Although one of the basic tools of acculturation is education, different dynamics affect foreign students. Examining the adaptation processes of Chinese students in the UK, Zhou et al. (2008) stated that general cultural differences, academic culture differences, and learning culture differences affect the adaptation process.

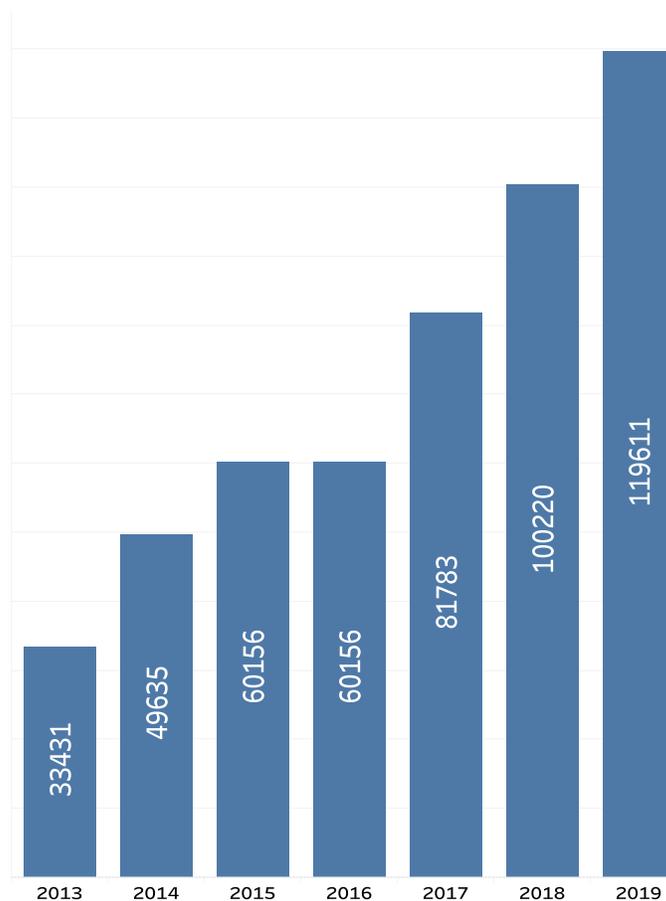
### **International Students and Their Mobility in Turkey**

In the OECD's report entitled Education at a Glance 2020 (OECD, 2020), the term "foreign students" refers to students who have an educational purpose and who cross borders for this purpose. With the most common definition, foreign student; he is a student studying in a different country other than his hometown. The sending of students abroad in the first half of the 19th century seems to be a national policy implemented within the scope of the Ottoman modernization policy. During the Ottoman period, Enderun and Tribal Schools hosted international

students. There were foreign students in Darülfünun, especially in military, police schools and other madrasas (Erdoğan, 2010).

In general, student mobility in higher education is from developing countries to developed countries, and this situation is economically important in countries where students go to study (Özçetin, 2013). The Soviet Union's disintegration in the early 1990s was to step up the international student mobility in Turkey. In 1992, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics dissolved. After that, a new process started in the world geography. Following the declaration of independence of Turkic Republics of Turkey, the Turkish state and in many areas and communities where relatives has entered into cooperation. The most important of these areas is education cooperation, one of the most concrete examples is the "Great Student Project". This project Since 1992, the Turkish Republic of Turkey and relatives secondary education at tertiary level students and community come (YTB, 2012). The number of foreign students in Turkey is increasing more and more (Figure 1). 2019-2020 academic year, Turkey has 119 611 international students from 222 different countries in higher education (YOK, 2021). All the developments in the foreign students mobility worldwide, it also affects Turkey. This caused the number of foreign students to increase rapid.

Figure 1. Changing the Number of International Students (Data Source: (YOK, 2021))



The aim of the project, the Turkish Republic and contribute to the education level of the community, trained people to contribute to meeting the power needs of Turkey and has been demonstrated as cultivate a friendly young generation. In this study, academic and cultural adjustment that occurred in the acculturation process of international students studying in Turkey is examined. In this context, the main purpose of this study is to determine how the acculturation process of international students takes place and whether this process is related to their academic achievement.

### **The Importance of Problems Experienced by Foreign Students**

While detailed studies of the adaptation process that foreign students experience while studying in a foreign environment are being done (Pedersen, 1991), education experts do not have a clear understanding of the differences between cultures. This creates a communication gap between educational institutions and foreign students (Heikinheimo & Shute, 1986).

Students who travel from home to other countries for schooling not only face many education issues as international students in the countries. According to a study by Lin and Yi (1997), foreign students struggle with various issues such as cultural and communication problems, lack of social support, language barriers, academic issues, financial, psychological, and entertainment. The problems of foreign students in Turkey made based on the results of different studies are classified as follows: International students often have difficulty eating in the first month because the flavors are different from their own. Many studies have found that foreign students' lack of social integration is a cause of unhappiness and a negative feeling towards the host country (Aydın, 2020; J. Zhou & Cole, 2017). In the development of intercultural friendships and efficient contact, language capacity is regarded as a significant factor (Aydın, 2020). Ward and Masgoret (2004) found that New Zealand international students claimed that their lack of English proficiency was hindering their interactions with their hosts. Lee (2010) argued that for students from non-western countries who attended universities in the United States and Europe, linguistic gaps were regarded as major barriers.

Different research also demonstrated that personality characteristics influence intercultural partnerships, in addition to the language difference between local and foreign students (Aydın, 2020). Personality as a predictor of the intercultural competence of college students was investigated by Peifer and Yangchen (2017). Extraversion and agreeability were perceived to be essential variables of social interaction in their research.

A further aspect affecting the relationship between local and foreign students has been found to be cultural variations. Many researchers have suggested that local students have an ethnocentric mindset towards foreign students in typical destinations (Aydın, 2020). In the study conducted by Zhou et al. (2008), the cultural dimension even affects the way study of international students. For those foreign students who have never traveled abroad before, the first glimpse of the new culture could be quite complicated. When traveling or researching in a different

country, even those students who have already had contact with other cultures will require adaptation (Çetin et al., 2017).

Due to the fact that foreign students encounter different geographic, social, social, cultural, and psychological conditions in the country they go to for education, it is inevitable for them to experience very different problems such as language inadequacy, social adaptation, economic problems, and cultural differences. If individuals cannot use the language sufficiently, they will have adaptation problems and individuals who cannot express themselves psychologically sufficiently experience problems during their social behavior (Karaoğlu, 2007). In summary, related research has found that the absence of language skills, cultural differences, and distinct personality attributes are essential to developing obstacles to local and foreign student relationships. In this context, cultural differences in the adaptation of international students will be discussed.

## **Method**

In this section, information about the research model, study group, data collection techniques, preparation of data collection tool, data collection and methods and techniques used in data analysis are given.

### **Research Model**

This research; conducted with quantitative screening method to determine the cultural differences that foreign students encounter during the education process in Samsun province. Quantitative studies are more precise and generalizable studies using empirical data and statistical methods. There are different types of quantitative research in itself and one of them is survey research. The most general purpose of survey research is to describe the characteristics of the studied sample in terms of certain variable(s) (Fraenkel et al., 2012). In this study, The Adaptation of Turkish Culture Questionnaire (AOTCQ) used to serve analysis.

### **Polulation and Sample**

The population of this research consists of 5270 international students studying at Ondokuz Mayıs University in Samsun in the 2019-2020 academic year. The sample of this study consists of 670 foreign students studying at Ondokuz Mayıs University.

### **Problem Statement**

Is the cultural difference experienced by international students related to their academic success?

### **Sub-problems of the Research**

- 1- What is level of foreign students about Adaptation of Turkish Culture (AOTCQ)?
- 2- Is there a statistically significant difference in the level of AOTCQ in terms of students' gender?
- 3- Is there a statistically significant difference in the level of AOTCQ in terms of their place of residence?
- 4- Is there a statistically significant difference in the level of AOTCQ in terms of their academic success?

- 5- Is there a statistically significant difference in the level of AOTCQ in terms of their education levels?
- 6- Is there a statistically significant difference in the level of AOTCQ in terms of the faculties they study?
- 7- Is there a statistically significant difference in the level of AOTCQ in terms of their age?

### Data Collection Tools

In the research, 5-point Likert type The Adaptation of Turkish Culture Questionnaire (AOTCQ) developed by the researcher was used as the data collection tool. There are 50 items in the first version of the questionnaire. Expert review was consulted for content validity. After the expert opinion, the number of items in the questionnaire was 26. The questionnaire was applied in 4 languages: Turkish, Arabic, Russian, and English. In calculating the total score of the questionnaire, 3 items were scored in reverse. The increase in the total score of the survey shows that the students have problems with Adaptation of Turkish Culture.

### Data Collection and Analysis

The information obtained with the measurement tool is limited to the number of foreign students. It was reached and the information was obtained by analyzing the collected data. These findings are interpreted and reported. Jamovi (1.6.9.0) software used to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics such as arithmetic mean, standard deviation, percentage and frequency were calculated in analyzing the data. To determine the statistical test, first determine whether the total score has a normal distribution. For sample sizes greater than 300, Skewness / SEskewness and Kurtosis / SEkurtosis should be smaller than 7 (Kim, 2013). In this study, Skewness / SEskewness= 0.324/0.0944 (3.43) and Kurtosis / SEkurtosis=0.301/0.189 (1.59). It can be accepted that the total score has a normal distribution. So independent sample t-test and one-way ANOVA test are used to test the statistical difference (Pallant, 2007). Statistical significance is based on the 0.05 level. While analyzing the interaction of the dependent variable with the independent variables, Problems experienced by foreign students are dependent variable, cultural differences are independent variables t test, one-way analysis of variance, and LSD statistical techniques were used.

## Findings and Interpretation

### Findings Regarding the First sub-problem

Table 1.

*The Level of Foreign Students About Adoption of Turkish Culture*

N	Mean	SD	Media	Min	Max	Min <sub>sample</sub>	Max <sub>sample</sub>	Percentage
670	70.5	8.22	70	26	130	46	98	47.3

Considering that the min score that can be obtained from the questionnaire is 26, but the min score for the participants is 46, it shows that there are no participants at a very low level. At the same time, the maximum score that can be obtained from the questionnaire is 130, but the maximum score for the sample is 98, which indicates that there are no participants at a very high adaptation level. As a result, students' level of adaptation is medium.

**Findings Regarding the Second sub-problem**

Table 2.

*Total Score and T-Test Results According to Gender*

Group	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Female	410	70.8	8.33	1.303	668	0.193
Male	254	70.0	8.03			

While the mean score of male students is 70, the mean score of female students is 70.8. Since  $p(0.193) > 0.05$  according to the results of the independent sample t-test conducted to test the statistical significance of the differentiation, the difference is not at the level of statistical significance. In other words, it can be said that female and male participants are similar levels.

**Findings Regarding the Third sub-problem**

Table 3.

*Total Score and ANOVA Results According to Place of Residence*

Place of Residence	N	Mean	SD	F(2,661)	p
living in dorms	263	71.0	8.19	0.919	0.400
living on rent	360	70.1	8.12		
living in own home	41	70.7	8.49		

According to Table 3, the mean of the total scores of the students according to the places they live are different. The mean score of students who live in dorms is a bit higher than others. To check the difference is statistically meaningful, the one-way ANOVA test is applied. Test results  $F(2,661)=0.919$  and  $p(0.400) > 0.05$ , so the difference are not statistical meaningful. Participants have a similar level.

**Findings regarding the fourth sub-problem**

Table 4.

*Total Score and ANOVA Results According to Academic Success*

Academic Success	N	Mean	SD	F(3,666)	p
91-100	108	70.0	7.92	0.334	0.801
80-90	197	70.5	8.40		
70-79	203	70.9	7.96		
60-69	162	70.3	8.56		

According to Table 4, the mean of the total scores of the students according to academic success are different. The mean score of students who has 70-79 academic success is a bit higher than others. To check the difference is

statistically meaningful, the one-way ANOVA test is applied. Test results  $F(3,666)=0.334$  and  $p(0.801) > 0.05$ , so the difference are not statistical meaningful. Participants have a similar level according to academic success.

### Findings Regarding the Fifth sub-problem

Table 5.

*Total Score and ANOVA Results According to Educational Level*

<b>Educational Level</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>F(3,666)</b>	<b>p</b>
Undergraduate	457	70.7	8.37	0.405	0.667
Master	167	70.0	8.27		
Doctorate	46	70.4	6.39		

According to Table 5, the mean of the total scores of the students according to educational level are different. The mean score of students who are in undergraduate is a bit higher than others. To check the difference is statistically meaningful, the one-way ANOVA test is applied. Test results  $F(3,666)=0.405$  and  $p(0.667) > 0.05$ , so the difference are not statistical meaningful. Participants have a similar level according to educational level.

### Findings regarding the sixth sub-problem

Table 6.

*Total Score and ANOVA Results According to Faculty*

<b>Faculty</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>F(15,654)</b>	<b>p</b>
Tourism	17	67.4	6.88		
Fine Arts	29	68.5	6.33		
Communication	11	68.5	10.11		
Architecture	11	68.7	4.94		
Science and Letters	74	69.1	9.15		
Agriculture	23	69.1	7.41		
Dentistry	64	69.2	7.42		
Health Sciences	55	69.4	7.47	1.68	0.051
Others	17	69.9	9.87		
Engineering	121	70.5	7.94		
Economics	111	71.6	8.34		
Education	36	71.8	8.92		
Theology	30	72.4	6.22		
Law	9	72.7	9.31		
Medical School	50	72.9	9.03		
Veterinary Medicine	12	75.8	10.55		

According to Table 5, the mean of the total scores of the students according to their faculty are different. The veterinary medicine faculty of students' mean score is highest and the tourism faculty of students' mean score is lowest. To check the difference is statistically meaningful, the one-way ANOVA test is applied. Test results  $F(15,654)=1.68$  and  $p(0.0501) > 0.05$ , so the difference are not statistical meaningful. Participants have a similar level according to their faculty.

### Findings Regarding the Seventh sub-problem

Table 7.

*Total Score and ANOVA Results According to Their Age*

Age	N	Mean	SD	F(4,665)	p	Effect size (partial $\eta^2$ )	Difference
18-19	71	71.6	8.40				
20-21	151	70.6	7.79			0.026	
22-23	153	71.0	7.86	4.52	0.001		
24-25	116	72.1	8.95				
25 and above	179	68.4	7.99				

According to Table 6, the mean of the total scores of the students according to their age are different. The mean score of students who are at 24-25 years is highest and the mean score of students who are at 25 years and above is lowest. To check the difference is statistically meaningful, the one-way ANOVA test is applied. Test results  $F(15,654)=4.52$  and  $p(0.001) < 0.05$ , so the difference are statistical meaningful. Effect size ise calculated as 0.026, it has low level effect. Because Homogeneity of Variances Test (Levene's)  $F(4,664)= 1.83$  and  $p(0.121) > 0.05$ , so Tukey Post-Hoc test is applied to determine group differences. According to the results of the analysis, the differentiation is between the age group 25 and over and 18-19, 22-23, and 24-25 years old. Students aged 25 and over have fewer problems with adaptation. The group aged 25 and above have fewer problems with adaptation.

## Conclusion, Discussion and Suggestions

In the study, it was examined whether the cultural adaptation levels of international students vary according to gender, place of residence, academic achievement level, education level, faculty they attend, and their age. According to the research results, the general adaptation level of the students is medium. In the studies conducted, the gender of the students affects their adaptation. Paksoy et al. (2012) reported that the adaptation of foreign male students to the university is higher than female students. It has been determined that there is a significant relationship between the opinions about the problems experienced in adopting the society and that girls adopt the society more easily than boys (Özçetin, 2013). In the study conducted by Kyalo and Chumba (2011), it was observed that there was no difference between the social and academic adaptations of male and female students. In this study, the cultural adaptation levels of the students according to their gender were not statistically different. On

the contrary, Özçetin (2013) stated that female students have higher social adaptation. As a result, local and international students living away from their families experience financial, accommodation and food and beverage problems. Contrary to our study, Özçetin (2013) and Sungur et al. (2016) reported that there was no significant difference between foreign students' adaptation to university according to their place of stay.

In this study, cultural adaptation levels did not differ statistically according to the academic success of the students. However, Nasir (2012) concluded that cultural adaptation is effective in the academic success of international students, and states that students who score high on the cultural adaptation scale also have high grade point averages. There was no significant difference between adaptation to Turkish culture and education level. According to a study conducted by Rienties et al. (2012) with 670 international and 288 local students studying in the Netherlands, it was observed that among the international students participating in the study, students from the West were more successful than students from the East in terms of academic and social cohesion. Foreign students shows that differences in opinion about the food culture in Turkey. Most of the students stated that they had difficulty in getting used to Turkish food when they first came, but they got used to it over time. The data obtained as a result of the studies conducted by Schmader, Major and Gramzow (2001) and Sodowsky and Plake (1992) support the research result of Hanassab (2006). Because of the similarities between the students surveyed in Turkey, Turkish culture with their culture they encounter it is determined by prejudice or exclusion. According to findings, students aged 25 and over have fewer problems with adaptation. The group aged 25 and above have fewer problems with adaptation. Age is an effective factor in cultural adaptations. However, according to the results of the study conducted by Özçetin (2013) there is generally no significant difference in the social adaptation of foreign students according to the age variable. In the study conducted by Çetin et al. (2017), it was determined that elderly people were more likely to welcome the behaviors in the host culture.

In summary, while the participants' age is a factor affecting cultural adaptation, the students' cultural adaptation does not change according to their gender, place of residence, level of education, academic performance, and the faculties they attend.

### **Suggestions**

In this study, no analysis was made according to the culture and social structure that the students came from. In future studies, it can be examined whether there is a differentiation in the adaptation of students according to the culture they came from. It can carry out studies involving advanced statistical techniques to determine the level of adaptation of students and the effectiveness of the factors that affect them. The study can be done with different data collection techniques and tools and the results can be compared. As the number of foreign students in higher education institutions increases, universities should offer more social and academic opportunities to these students.

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