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Bridges To The Future: Mobility Experiences Of Early-Career Researchers[1]

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Abstract

The aim of the study is to investigate the meaning attributed by early-career researchers to academic mobility, the sources of motivation for mobility, and the difficulties and opportunities faced by these researchers during their academic activities. The present study employed the qualitative research method in order to understand the participants' experiences more deeply. A semi-structured interview form was used for the study, and was carried out on 11 early-career researchers. The participants expressed their motives for mobility, their research experiences, and the difficulties they faced. The findings revealed the early-career researchers' sources of motivation for mobility and the difficulties and opportunities they encountered in this process.

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[1] In this study, the concept of " early-career researcher" was used for academicians who completed their PhD in the last five years.

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Introduction

Internationalization in higher education is becoming more important every day. In academic life, a researcher's international qualifications are greatly appreciated (Bauder et al., 2017). Mobility in higher education is one of internationalization's most important dimensions (Radloff, 2016), and mobility for research purposes has increased significantly in the last few years (Yang, 2020). At universities, it is more important than ever for academics to be mobile and international for their career prospects (Nikunen & Lempiäinenfile, 2020). International academics are more likely to participate in international teaching and research activities (Teichler, 2017), and most universities are willing to encourage internationalization (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

In many countries around the world, higher education institutions encourage early-career researchers to conduct research abroad as part of internationalization. In recent years, international mobility has become more crucial, especially in master's and doctoral studies, as many PhD candidates seek an academic career (Lambert et al., 2020; Skakni, 2018). Undoubtedly, international early-career researchers who strive to produce material through original research are at the center of the research process at universities (Kehm, 2008). For instance, trans-border mobility is thought to be parallel to career success (Enders, 1998); working in an internationalized institutional environment and regular contact with academics abroad increase the

likelihood of developing academic mobility plans (Netz & Jaksztat, 2014).

In this context, factors such as employment opportunities and research support (facilities and funding) play an important role in attracting highly qualified academics (Bennion & Locke, 2010). In connection, international doctoral or master students are encouraged and supported through higher education policies (Bauder et al., 2017).

On the other hand, the ultimate goal of competing for international early-career researchers is to increase a country's competitive advantages in scientific research. International experience is assumed to support transnational knowledge networks (Jöns, 2011) and contribute to the reputation and opportunities of early-career researchers (Nerdrum & Sarpebakken, 2006; Welch, 1997). Thus, the emphasis put on international mobility is getting stronger (Ackers, 2008; Franzoni et al., 2014). In this context, education politicians need to focus on the question, "How can international early-career researchers' mobility be further expanded?" Understanding the factors and experiences fostering early-career researchers' motivation for mobility is important because such mobility affects all aspects of society, from economics to science policies (Moed & Halevi, 2014).

The existing literature primarily focuses on researchers' sources of motivation for mobility (Ackers, 2005; Ackers et al., 2007; Pasztor, 2015). According to Ackers (2005), sources of motivation for mobility are related to employment opportunities, economic prospects, and personal development. Similarly, Ackers (2005) argues that the driving forces behind academic mobility are professional, in

other words, career-related (Conchi & Michaels, 2014; Delicado, 2010; Ivancheva & Gourova, 2011).

There are studies in the current literature investigating the sources of motivation that affect mobility experiences (Franzoni et al., 2014; Kim, 2017; Lee & Kuzhabekova, 2018; Morley et al., 2018), mobility models (Bauder et al., 2018; Hoffman, 2009; Kim, 2009), challenges to international mobility (Eisemann & Märdian, 2018; Harzing et al., 2013), career decisions of the students studying abroad (Jon et al., 2020), and the "research process" of doctoral students (Lezzerini & Hanks, 2016).

International experience is of great importance if pursued as part of personal scientific and cultural development and as the first step of an academic career (Avveduto, 2001). At the beginning of their profession, the international mobility efforts of academicians or early-career researchers are becoming more crucial in terms of academic specialization (Appelt et al., 2015). This suggests the need to take into account the factors (Guthrie et al., 2017; Lee, 1966; Lee & Kuzhabekova, 2018; Li & Bray, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002) affecting the mobility of international early-career researchers and to identify strategies to encourage greater researcher mobility.

However, it is seen that the academic mobility of international early-career researchers has largely been ignored. Very little is known about the mobility of researchers and academics expressed in the literature (Maadad & Tight, 2014; Teichler & Cavalli, 2015). More importantly, academic mobility is considered to increase scientific productivity in the early stages of a career (Horta, 2013).

Unfortunately, there is very little research on the academic mobility experiences of early-career researchers. Some researchers focus on short-term doctoral mobility (visits shorter than three

months) (i.e., Roberts, 2021), yet there is a need for further research to investigate the long-term mobility of early-career researchers. In particular, little is known about the experiences of Turkish international academicians who went abroad.

Moreover, the mobility of early-career researchers affects and shapes their careers as this plays an important role in scientific research. More research is needed in order to gain a deeper understanding of the motivations and experiences of international early-career researchers in higher education. In particular, the limited number of studies involving international early-career researchers' mobility makes the need for this research even more essential. For this reason, the main aim of the present study is to investigate the meaning attributed by early-career researchers to academic mobility, the sources of motivation for mobility, and the difficulties and opportunities faced by these researchers during their academic activities.

Theoretical Background

Human Capital and Migration Theory

International mobility is not a new phenomenon in the academic world. Scholars have been on the move internationally for centuries, but international mobility has become a rapidly growing phenomenon with spread of globalization. There is a varying degree of 'mobility expectation' in research careers depending on country and discipline (Yang, 2020).

The sociological roots of international student mobility originate from the phenomenon of "migration" (Taşçı & Aslan, 2019). Lee (1966) formed his theory of migration in 1966 with his article "A Theory of Migration." Lee says that push-pull factors are influential

in the decision-making process for people immigrating. When the factors affecting the process of immigration and the decision-making of immigrants are listed, location, destination, and obstacles come to the fore (Lee, 1966). Also, international migration theories are significant in that they take into account the country of destination, the characteristics of the country of origin (homeland), and the high quality of a country's academic institutions.

Moreover, early-career researchers' migration is an important component of knowledge migration. The benefits of immigration (pull factors) for students range from learning English (Baláž & Williams, 2004) to career development (Wiers-Jenssen, 2008). According to human capital theories, it is possible to explain this demand for international education not only by pull-push factors but also by the opportunities provided by international mobility. More importantly, early-career researchers involved in mobility accept that there is a strong correlation between the desire to acquire a variety of skills and the knowledge of the value of mobility and the ability to finance this mobility. In this context, early-career researchers' migration has begun to be considered within the context of migration, defined as the departure of individuals from their country for different purposes and going to another country for a certain period or permanently.

Push-pull factors affect motivation for mobility, an theories of international migration have often been used in the study of mobility motivations (Kondakçı, 2011; Li & Bray, 2007; Mazzarol & Soutar 2002; Wilkins et al., 2013). In order to understand the sources of motivation for mobility in higher education, the push-pull theory is often used as a reference. Researchers in higher education prefer the push-pull theory to explain the motivations and choices of

international researchers. For example, while political stability, economic development, and social welfare in a country are pull factors in international mobility (Barnett et al., 2016), negative developments such as social problems, political conflicts, and economic crises such as war in the country appear as push factors (Kondakçı et al., 2016). Furthermore, identified models show the importance of understanding academic mobility as a 'process' (Ackers et al., 2007).

Another significant point is that human capital migration theory shapes the international research mobility of early-career researchers. The idea of human capital has preferred migration theories (Emilsson & Mozetič, 2021). In human capital migration approaches, the focus is on the decision of the individual to migrate and this decision depends on what is to be gained from mobility (Khwaja, 2002). According to the human capital theory, mobility in this sense consists of the knowledge, skills, and experiences of the individual (Mention & Bontis, 2013; Schultz, 1961).

Additionally, international mobility is thought to be a human capital and increased productivity in economies (Emilsson & Mozetič, 2021). Also, it is often seen that early-career researchers' mobility is explained by the human capital theory of educational investment (Marginson, 2018).

Turkish Context

The demand for higher education is increasing with each day, which gives rise to various demographic consequences for all types of countries (Gürüz, 2011). Especially in countries where the economy is driven by knowledge, qualified labour force cannot be provided at the desired level, and constant updating is required to adapt to

changing demands and the creation of new knowledge (Gürüz, 2011). Therefore, researchers travel internationally for their research or study with international mobility. Around the world, higher education institutions are trying to get a share of international mobility, which is thought to have significant economic, social, political, and academic contributions to higher education institutions and individuals. One of these countries is Turkey.

Turkey has been sending students to foreign countries for them to receive higher education for a long time and thus, is one of the source countries (Kondakçı, 2011). On the other hand, it has also accelerated its efforts to attract more international students to its universities in recent years (Çetinsaya, 2014; Özoğlu et al., 2016).

According to Barblan, Ergüder, and Gürüz (2008);

> *This demand/supply imbalance is the major driver for the student outflow from Turkey, which has become a major country of origin for foreign students, or alternatively, a major importer of higher education services from the international higher education market (p.75).*

Today, the number of international students in Turkey, which was 21,948 in 2010, reached 185,047 in 2020, which is almost nine times higher (Study in Turkey, 2021). Özoğlu et al. (2015) point out that when a general evaluation of international mobility within the context of Turkey is made, it is seen that it has gained momentum with the higher education policies implemented in recent years. On the other hand, according to Kondakçı et al. (2017), argue that Turkey urgently needs policies at the national and institutional level in order to benefit from mobility economically, academically, socially, and

politically. However, there is very little research on the international academic experiences of early-career academicians at universities in Turkey. In the study conducted by Güngör and Tansel (2004), it was determined that the participants see universities abroad as much better quality than the ones in Turkey.

The literature briefly summarized here reveals that the mobility of researchers in the context of Turkey has not been studied extensively. Investigating the meaning attributed to mobility by researchers, why they prefer developing countries, and their experiences abroad will contribute to the international literature. Studies so far tend to focus more on international student mobility. In this connection, the current study was carried out to reflect the mobility experiences of the participants who went abroad from Turkey. The results are expected to contribute to both national and international literature, theoretically and practically.

Method

Research Design

The qualitative research method phenomenology design was used in this study to gain a deeper understanding of the researchers' international experiences regarding the phenomenon of mobility (Creswell, 2013). The purpose of phenomenology is to understand the human experience (van Manen, 2007). The phenomenology pattern is a method that will help the researchers to understand the effects of mobility more deeply throughout this process. Phenomenological research is divided into interpretive, existential, and transcendental. The interpretive phenomenological research design was used for this study (Heotis, 2020). The main point of this study is to focus on the

participants' international mobility experiences and the meanings these experiences have for them.

Preparation of the Data Collection Tool

As the data collection tool, a semi-structured interview form containing various sub-questions about the mobility experiences of the researchers during their studies was developed. With the opinion of an expert, the form was then finalized. IRB Istanbul 29 Mayıs University acquired the study, and the ethical rules of the study were followed. The interview form included questions about the participants' demographics, why they selected the countries and universities where they were conducting their studies, and the challenges and opportunities they encountered.

Research Participants

Participants for the current study were determined using the criterion sampling method (Creswell, 2013). The criteria determined for selecting the participants included conducting their doctoral or post-graduate studies abroad, staying more than 4 months abroad, and having a scholarship. The participants of the study were 5 males and 6 females from 29-37 years of age and had been studying abroad for a period ranging from 6 to 24 months. Maximum variation was attempted to ensure university, gender, age, research topic, and years of experience abroad. Research topics of the participants were history, museology, nuclear physics, digital play, environmental security, multiculturalism, quantification and consideration, political science, geomatics, energy security, and philosophy (see Table 1.).

Table 1. Demographic profile of the research participants

Participant	Age	Country	Research Topic	University
PM-1	31	U.K.	Museum	Leicester University
PM-2	28	U.K.	Digital Play	University of Sheffield
PM-3	37	U.S.	Environmental Security	American University
PM-4	37	Canada	Multiculturalism	Queen's University
PM-5	34	Russia	Political Science	Saint Petersburg University
PF-1	36	U.S.	History	George Mason University
PF-2	31	U.S.	Nuclear Physics	Columbia University
PF-3	29	U.K.	Education	University of East Anglia
PF-4	35	Canada	Geomatic	Calgary University
PF-5	35	U.K.	Energy Security	University of Sussex
PF-6	37	Germany	Philosophy	Vestfalya Wilhelm University

Data Collection

Firstly, early-career researchers studying abroad were contacted by e-mail and were asked whether they would like to participate in the study. With the early-career researchers who agreed to participate in the study on a volunteer basis, semi-structured interviews were conducted and lasted about 60-90 minutes. The interviews focused on four fields: the meaning of international mobility for the participants, their motivation to go abroad, opportunities provided by international experience, and the difficulties experienced. The interviews were then transcribed verbatim, yielding 11 transcripts, each ranging from 3,000 to 5,000 words.

Phenomenological Data Analysis

Finally, a phenomenological analysis was used to understand the researchers' international experiences regarding the phenomenon of mobility (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the 'interpretive phenomenological research' design was used (Heotis, 2020). The interviews were completed, transcribed, and then submitted for the participants' approval. Rather than the names of the participants, they were assigned codes (P1-P2) which are used in the text.

Interpretive phenomenological analysis examines lived experience where meaning is embedded in experience. Therefore, one's experience with the phenomenon and how the meaning is formulated from it can be understood through interpretation. In this respect, phenomenological data analysis in this study made it easier for us to understand the lives of the early-career researchers.

A phenomenological study has a unique analysis process that is different from other qualitative research designs. The general stages of phenomenological data analysis are data preparation, phenomenological reduction of data, creative variation, and revealing the essence of experience (Giorgi, 2009) (see Figure 1.):

Figure 1. Stages of phenomenological data analysis

After these stages were completed, the results of the research were summarized according to the variables and are presented in combination with direct quotations from the participants who were coded as PM-1 (Participant Male-1), PF-1, (Participant Female-1), etc.

After this process, each interview text was read by three researchers in order to gain a holistic perspective. Then, by analyzing the interview texts, the structure of the experiences of the early-career researchers was attempted to be determined. In the last stage of the analysis, common themes were identified, and the researchers' international experiences regarding mobility were revealed.

Results

The meaning of international mobility for the participants:

The first priority of this study was to explore the meaning attributed to international mobility by the participants. For example, one participant explained what international mobility meant to him/her, including many components of it (dissemination of information, benefiting from the experiences of professors, improving language competence):

> *International mobility actually plays a very important role in the professional development of academicians. Moreover, benefiting from the experiences of professors in the field is the first thing that comes to my mind. In addition to these, it means improving your language competence and experiencing language learning personally, for example you can have more experience in understanding jokes, facial expressions and gestures and enhance your cultural awareness (PF-6).*

Another participant explained international mobility by pointing to the information dissemination mission of higher education and underlining collaborations:

> *In my opinion, international mobility is actually a process of information dissemination. For example, through joint studies, academic articles, conferences or other communication channels, information can be spread around the world via mobility (PF-5).*

Five of the participants explained academic mobility in relation to professional development:

> *International mobility means professional development, especially for early-career researchers because the mobility experience offers opportunities to advance in one's academic career and to develop his/her academic skills. It is a great professional development opportunity, especially for researchers from developing countries. In this regard, international mobility is not just to be included in the CV; rather, it is a great experience (PM-5).*

Another participant defined international mobility within the framework of access to international networks:

> *As a person at the beginning of his/her academic career, I think that international mobility is very important in order to establish an international network. Therefore, in*

my opinion, international mobility is an indispensable goal in order to learn the perspectives of different countries, different disciplines, especially to expand international networks (PF-3).

Academic mobility can cross borders. It can improve one's vision. One can learn new information in different cultures, systems and different geographies, establish different connections (PM-2).

Sources of motivation for going abroad:

The sources of the researchers' motivation for mobility were gathered under 2 main categories: Push-pull factors.

As for the push factors, the participants preferred to participate in international mobility for different reasons such as lack of funding in higher education, absence of academic quality and research culture, inadequate opportunities to learn English in Turkey, shortage of academician who are expert in their fields and inadequate mentorship support, lack of opportunities to establish academic networks in Turkey and political reasons. As for the pull factors, the participants preferred to participate in international mobility for different reasons such as academic quality and research culture, opportunities research topics, field experts, network, professional development. For example, country and university, countries where English is spoken, research topics and field experts. Six international early-career researchers selected universities where they could speak English. For 5 of them, the prestige of the university, availability of good professors in the field, employment conditions were the main

reasons behind their choice. Also, according to participants, university selection was associated with high "university visibility".

> *I selected Columbia University. Columbia was in the top 10-15 in university rankings both in the US and in the world. Also, prominent professors in my field were there. In fact, I had the opportunity to meet and exchange ideas with all of them (PF-2).*

> *In fact, I applied to several leading universities. Since I did not decide on the subject for my thesis at that time, my applications were only based on the university ranking; I did not pay much attention to the studies of the faculty at the university. I thought that I would have a better opportunity to improve myself in a higher-ranked university and listing that university on my CV would benefit my career. I had to choose between the two universities that sent me the earliest acceptance letters due to my concerns about the visa process: University of Sheffield and Leeds University (PM-2).*

One participant stated that he/she chose the University of East Anglia in England by referring to the opportunity to benefit from the experiences of professors working in international evaluation programs such as OECD or PISA as follows:

> *I selected the University of East Anglia in England. First of all, the educational practices in the UK are quite different when compared to Turkey and the university employed professors who contributed to the development*

> *of evaluation of international assessment programs (PISA, PIACC), or worked at the OECD. I selected employed academicians who evaluated the PISA exams (PF-3).*

One of the participants stated that the location of the university was effective on his/her university selection:

> *Since Washington DC is the heart of the world, the center of international relations, and provides great opportunities, I chose D.C. and decided to study at a foundation university (PM-3).*

Countries where English is spoken. Language can affect the mobility of graduate and PhD researchers in several ways. Language is often an important factor for researchers to determine which country or university they will study. Researchers also talked about their reasons why they selected specific countries. Five researchers chose universities where they would be able to speak in English. The following participants explained why language was an important factor affecting their decision on which country to conduct their academic studies and the participant also stressed that English-speaking countries are leading nations in higher education:

> *For example, one participant stated that the reason for choosing an English-speaking country as the global acceptance of the language since English is universal (PM-3).*

Research topics, field experts. Another factor affecting the university selection of the researchers is the research topic. For example, one participant stated that he/she chose a university having the world's first museum department in connection with his/her field of study. He/she underlines the effect of the network created during the excavations with the best instructors in this field as follows:

> *Firstly, I preferred the Liverpool and Freiburg universities because I met professors who were recruited in these universities during excavations, and they were good in their field (postgraduate). Secondly, I selected the University of Leicester due to the academic background; it is the home to the first museology department in the world (PM-1).*

Similarly, a researcher who has a doctorate in philosophy explained the reason why he/she chose Germany for his/her academic studies by referring to the fact that famous professors in the field of philosophy worked there as follows:

> *Since I studied philosophy, I wanted to conduct my scientific activities in Germany, which is one of the leading countries in this field and has famous philosophers. My thesis supervisor, who had lived in Germany for two years during his own thesis studies, strongly recommended me to go to Germany (PF-6).*

One participant expressed the reason for choosing the USA for his/her research in the nuclear field by referring to the small number

of these studies in Turkey and difficulty of having access to international studies in this field in Turkey as follows:

> *My doctoral dissertation was on the USA's nuclear deterrence in East Asia. The fact that the field was quite untapped in Turkey and limited access to international resources convinced me to do my research abroad. (PF-2).*

Different from the others, a researcher explained that the motivation for his/her going to Russia was to better understand Turkish-Russian relations and then to develop his/her career in Turkey, where there is very little work in this field as follows:

> *The reason why I especially wanted to go to Russia is that my field of study includes some regions within the borders of today's Russia. For this reason, doing research in a Russian university in Russia will help me conduct original studies in the future. It has been important to understand Turkish-Russian relations throughout history. I made this decision because it is important to understand a Russia that is getting stronger today, and to experience it on the spot, especially by learning Russian and accessing local resources (PM-5).*

Participation in conferences, authoring joint papers, collaboration, network. Another contribution of academic mobility to their academic career was the important relationships they established during their stay and their meeting with leading researchers. More importantly, many of them are still collaborating with the researchers they met. It is understood that especially early-career researchers' mobility experiences improved their networks and

enabled them to obtain opportunities such as co-publishing:

> *I attended two international conferences during my stay in the USA. I presented a paper at conferences organized by the International Studies Association, one in Baltimore and another in New Orleans. I had the opportunity to meet and publish with academicians from different regions of the world at the conference. Someone was the editor of a publishing house that would publish our book, and they gave us the chance to publish an international book (PM-3).*

Opportunities as human capital:

Participation in and observation of the courses. The researchers described their learning experiences as positive to a great extent. They had the opportunity to learn teaching methods and techniques, and strategies in a different country. Sample comments are below:

> *I took 3 courses, one of which was instructed by my advisor, in my field of research (Seminar on Cold War, Relations with Japan, Relations with Korea). I would like to research the relations of these countries with Turkey. First, all the professors were very punctual. They all were very knowledgeable about current affairs in their own country and in the world. The classes were interactive. They asked questions, answered each question with patience, and made us think (PF-2).*

> *I took two courses instructed by my advisor in the USA. These were the International Environmental Law and International Organizations courses. The courses were*

> *not only instructed in the classroom, but we visited the institutions associated with the topic and participated in panels. I had the opportunity to improve myself by attending sessions held at the World Bank, U.S. Department of State, and environmentalist NGOs (PM-3).*

Mindset and Vision - Research Culture. Another issue emphasized by the participants was the high quality of higher education, productivity, openness to interdisciplinary research, and positive opinions of researchers in the host country about the scientific research culture. For example, a researcher compares the research culture in the country he/she visited to that of Turkey as follows:

> *I gained idealistic perspectives on how to teach, how to research, and how to write articles. Writing articles, books, etc. is seen as an easy task in Turkey. But Columbia and my advisor imparted a realistic perspective to me on how to conduct a scientific study and how to build a foundation for every sentence we write (PF-2).*

Other researchers, on the other hand, emphasized that through academic mobility, they developed their ability to look at events from different perspectives and established dialogue with other scientists, and that they became aware of the need for academic studies to be conducted in accordance with ethical principles, to be original and to encourage critical thinking:

> *Academic mobility has improved my ability to view events from different perspectives and to establish a dialogue with other scientists (PM-1).*
>
> *…I have learned many things about how to follow ethical principles through academic mobility, great contributions to my development. I have learned how to reflect critical thinking in an article, and this is very important as I am a philosopher. In Turkey, many of the studies have been produced by means of copy and paste. Researchers in Turkey need to make more use of the critical paradigm... however, a scientist needs to reflect critical thinking, questioning, and discussion in his/her writings. I think Germany is among the best countries to use critical thinking as a means of reflection (PF-6).*

Some of the participants stated that they understood better how scientific research should be done and gained an epistemological perspective on the production of knowledge in research:

> *Academic mobility has improved my ability to view events from different perspectives and to establish a dialogue with other scientists (PM-1).*
>
> *I acquired idealistic perspectives on how to lecture, how to research and how to write a paper. In Turkey, writing an article, a book, etc. is considered to be a fairly easy task. However, Columbia and my advisor provided me with a realistic perspective on how to conduct a scientific study and how to provide a basis for each sentence we*

written (PF-2).

Some of the participants expressed that there is insufficient mentoring on how to conduct scientific research in Turkey and also stated that they better understood how scientific research should be done in the country they went to and gained an epistemological perspective on knowledge production in research:

> *Frankly, it was an unforgettable memory for me, I was very busy during these 15 months and had to endure several difficulties. However, I think it was worth it as it significantly contributed to me academically and personally. Since the education systems were a little different from each other, adaptation was a bit difficult for me. To put it simply, they do not teach you anything there. However, they encourage you to learn on your own. No one taught me which research methods to use while doing research, or how to conduct face-to-face interviews or what ethical rules are. As someone who was trained in the Turkish education system, I was inclined to ask what I should do and how I should do it; thus, it was a bit difficult at first but then I got used to it and learned to act accordingly (PM-3).*

Some of the participants admitted that while developing a reflexive approach to their experiences, their epistemological and cultural perspectives on knowledge production also changed:

> *The most important gain was the acquisition of a different perspective and awareness about the necessity of deeper and more comprehensive field knowledge. I became more aware of the fact that any academic work should be conducted in compliance with ethical principles, should be original and should foster critical thinking. Collaboration with people from different cultures and nationalities helped me learn about different ideas and requirements in the field (PF-6).*

Challenges in the host country:

The participants talked about challenges they faced in their academic, economic, bureaucratic, and socio-cultural lives.

The first challenge participants indicated is the language.

> *The biggest problem was the Russian language. I remember that I had a relatively difficult time finding the necessary information for my studies (PM-5).*

> *The most significant problem I encountered when I first went abroad to Germany was the language and the different educational system (PM-1).*

> *The language was a major problem and the education system and the expectations of the education system from students were very different compared to Turkey. (PF-3).*

The second challenge participants indicated is lack of funds. One participant expressed the difficulties he/she experienced regarding the shortage of funds as follows:

> *I experienced financial problems due to the sudden rise of the Euro. A loaf of bread was around 1 Euro. This was 7-8 TL. Paying 10 Euros for a cup of filter coffee was annoying (PF-6).*

The third challenge participants indicated is related to bureaucracy. Some participants mentioned various challenges they experienced at varying degrees of bureaucracy (e.g., visa procedures), In particular, they expressed the difficulties they faced during the collection of application documents. Sample views are as follows:

> *I first sent an e-mail to my advisor there during the application process and in the feedback, the advisor stated that the topic was interesting, and they could accept me as a visitor the same day. I received detailed information about my rights and university rules from the advisor's assistant. The acceptance process went smoothly in a planned and fast manner. University requested a bank statement to demonstrate that I could pay for my expenses, and I sent it to them (approximately $ 2800 per month for a total of $ 16,800 for 6 months). With this document, university sponsored me, and I had no problem obtaining a J1 visa (PF-2).*

> *The visa procedures were the biggest challenge. I thought I could easily get a visa with my invitation letter and grant documents. I had to document that I earned a minimum of 720 Euros per month. Although I could document that I had sufficient funds in my account, they asked me to open a blocked bank account in Germany. Unfortunately, the Turkish bank's account statements*

> *did not work. The process was extremely costly and daunting (PF-6).*

Another challenge one participant indicated is the political relations between countries:

> *… It was a period of time which was dominated by somewhat chaotic and harsh policies in American-Turkish relationships. That's why, I can say that I felt a little uneasy when I went there (PM-5).*

Discussion

The current study investigated the meaning attributed by early-career researchers to academic mobility, the sources of motivation for mobility, the difficulties and opportunities faced by these researchers during their academic activities.

Firstly, the meaning of international mobility was focused on because knowing the mental models of the participants regarding the meaning of international mobility has facilitated the process of revealing and making sense of the driving forces of mobility in the context of Turkey. Wildavsky (2012) underlines that the concept of academic mobility has changed in recent years. Byram and Dervin (2008) explain the term 'academic mobility' as follows: "It is an old phenomenon because the idea of a university is of a place of teaching and learning open to all, whatever their provenance, provided they can benefit themselves and others; and universities date back hundreds of years" (p.1). When the participants of international academic mobility meanings of mobility are considered, it is seen that early-career researchers are aware of the contribution transborder

mobility has to their professional careers. The participants explained the concept of international mobility by pointing to the following: Professional development, benefiting from the experiences of professors, improving language competence, access to international networks, higher education's mission of disseminating information and collaborations. In general, the participants perceive academic mobility positively (e.g. Welch, 1997). These results showed that the meaning attributed to the concept of "international academic mobility" is also extremely important. The findings of the study are clearly consistent with the definition of academic mobility.

Secondly, the sources of motivation that the researchers explained for mobility were gathered under two main categories: Pull and push. When a general evaluation of international mobility within the context of Turkey is made, it is seen that in recent years it has gained momentum with the implementation of higher education policies (Çetinsaya, 2014; Özoğlu et al., 2016). According to Kondakçı et al. (2017), although Turkey has significant advantages in terms of experience, capacity, geographical location, and historical and cultural ties with the countries in its region, it cannot benefit from international student mobility to the desired extent compared to other countries around the world; thus, it needs policies at the national level and strategies at the institutional level.

When the push-pull factors are examined for Turkey in this context, it is understood that the participants preferred to participate in international mobility for reasons such as lack of funding in higher education, absence of academic quality and research culture, inadequate opportunities to learn English, presence of very few universities in the world university ranking, shortage of expert academicians in their fields, inadequate mentorship support, and lack

of opportunities to establish academic networks within Turkey. It is seen that in their university and country selection, the participants largely preferred English-speaking countries as language plays a role in the selection of the country, and English-speaking countries are highly popular (OECD, 2009). Researchers preferred English-speaking countries because of their high-ranking universities (Bauder et al., 2017). In addition, the search for quality higher education is emerging as one of the most important factors pushing participants to English-speaking countries and universities. The explanations of the participants showed the academic quality and research culture of their university as the most important factors that attracted them to their preferred country. Previous studies indicate that international students prefer Western countries for reasons such as high quality of education and the reputation of the country or institution (Rostan & Höhle, 2014). However, other factors are also important, such as geographic proximity, cultural and historical connections, exchange programs or scholarships, and immigration policies (OECD, 2009). It is seen that the majority of the participants in this study preferred English-speaking countries (Bauder et al., 2017; Matanle & Mcintosh, 2020).

Additionally, the prestige of the host university and its place in the university rankings are among the pull factors (Nerdrum & Sarpebakken, 2006). Also, this factor affects students' decision-making processes when choosing a university (Becker & Kolster, 2012; Mazzarol 1998). Also, the opportunity to work with colleagues who are experts in their field and recruited in prestigious institutions is considered a powerful drive for the mobility of researchers (Appelt et al., 2015).

Other influential decision factors in moving were found to include collaborations, networking, field experts, and research topics. Indeed, networks play an important role in mobility decisions (Delicado, 2010). In other words, researchers use academic mobility to support networking. In particular, it is understood that the mobility experiences of early-career researchers allowed them to obtain opportunities such as co-publishing by expanding their networks. They especially emphasized the different points from the Turkish academic world while explaining their experiences. For example, some participants stated that they better understood how scientific research should be done and gained an epistemological perspective on knowledge production in research. While another researcher compared the research culture in the country, they visited to that of Turkey; they underlined the inadequacy of the scientific research culture in Turkey and the lack of conducting scientific research mentoring. A participant's experiences in Germany related to the need for researchers to use critical thinking skills as a means of reflection are very interesting. Most of the researchers stated that they gained a lot of experience in the country they visited regarding the question, "How to conduct scientific research?" and gained an epistemological perspective on knowledge production in research.

In this context, it is seen that the participants are building a better career for their future. At the same time, a successful academic career requires collaborating with reputable researchers, publishing in internationally recognized scientific journals, and attending important international conferences in their field (Wohlert et al., 2016). It is known that earning a doctoral degree from a top institution significantly increases the likelihood that a researcher will be accepted as a visiting scholar by renowned institutions.

Furthermore, as seen in this study, the mobility experience of international early-career researchers affected the decision to be mobile in the following years. The researchers believe that they will collect the fruits of their international mobility experiences in the future, especially when they return to Turkey, as they will become scientific researchers who will make a difference in their field. Parallel to this finding, Puustinen-Hopper's (2005) research on doctoral mobility concluded that "personal connections play a central role in the recruitment of researchers and doctoral students" (p.21).

Another interesting yet not surprising finding is that doctoral advisors play a key role in encouraging their students to seek opportunities abroad and new networks and are usually the first "trigger" for an outward movement (Ackers et al., 2007). In the current study, one participant stated that his doctoral advisor encouraged him to move abroad. Avveduto's (2001) research highlights the role a doctoral student's networks play in subsequent transition and location decisions. Similarly, in the current study, it was seen that the supporter behind the motivation of a participant and the person who contributed to the decision was the thesis advisor.

Thirdly, internationalization in higher education includes a complex set of initiatives that provide researchers with opportunities to gain a global perspective and acquire intercultural skills that can increase human capital (Costello, 2018). Human capital development includes many components such as educational experiences abroad, international research, and partnerships (Hayward & Siaya, 2001). One of these is international mobility experiences. It is seen that the effect of the participants' overseas mobility experiences on their current international activities is positive. The international mobility

of the participants is positively associated with international teaching, research cooperation, and information dissemination. Previous studies also support this result (e.g. Rostan & Höhle, 2014).

On the other hand, early-career researchers, who are naturally the central element of human and intellectual capital in universities, are the subject of this. In this context, one of the most significant investments to be made for early-career researchers is to encourage them to be internationally mobile. As a matter of fact, international mobility provides early-career researchers with opportunities and contributes to the establishment of professional and often long-term international networks (Bauder, 2015). The exposure of early-career researchers who are involved in internationalization activities in higher education to international experiences contributes to their professional development; in other words, it can contribute to the developmental processes of human capital. Participation in and observation of the courses, authoring joint papers, collaboration, mindset and vision, and research culture all created opportunities they otherwise might not have had. Participants also received the opportunity to learn teaching methods, techniques, and strategies in different countries.

Another issue emphasized by the participants was the high quality of higher education, productivity, openness to interdisciplinary research, and positive opinions of researchers in the host country regarding the scientific research culture. In particular, some participants stated that they better understood how scientific research should be done and gained an epistemological perspective on the production of knowledge in research. Some participants admitted that while developing a reflexive approach to their

experiences, their epistemological and cultural perspectives on knowledge production also changed.

On the other hand, some researchers stated that the experiences abroad contributed not only to their professional development but also to their personal development. In a study conducted by Avveduto (2001), many students emphasized that several difficulties, such as differences in methods and approaches encountered abroad, became benefits on their return home. In the same study, they declared that the advantages provided by academic mobility are highly scientific and educational. Many previous studies have shown that international mobility has a positive effect on career and professional development (Oosterbeek & Webbink, 2011; Wiers-Jenssen, 2008). The current study shows that the participation of early-career researchers in international mobility contributes to their professional development and academic vision.

Another contribution academic mobility had to their academic career was the important relationships they established during their stay and their ability to meet with leading researchers. More importantly, many of them are still collaborating with the researchers they met (e.g. Puustinen-Hopper, 2005).

Additionally, educated people are the dominant forces of knowledge and an essential factor in developing knowledge economies (Vidotto et al., 2017). In connection to this, the participants stated that they participated in international mobility to improve their academic knowledge and qualifications, develop their networks, and increase their cooperation. This result is an indication that the participants have invested in their careers and thus acted in line with the human capital theory.

Finding is that the participation of researchers in the early years of their careers in international mobility contributes to both their professional development and their academic vision. International mobility seems to positively affect the professional development of academicians. In addition, professional development, development of language competence, communication with international colleagues, establishing collaborations, and developing networks through partnerships are other contributions of international mobility.

Finally, the challenges encountered by the international researchers while they were abroad were gathered under four main categories. The participants talked about challenges they faced in their academic, economic, political, and socio-cultural lives. Most of the participants talked about challenges they faced with language, bureaucracy, lack of funds, and the political relations between countries. Numerous studies have shown that "funding" is the main obstacle to the mobility of researchers (Ivancheva & Gourova, 2011; Lezzerini & Hanks, 2016). It is also believed that providing funds for researchers to participate in international academic mobility will indirectly benefit from increasing future mobility (Netz & Jaksztat, 2014; Saint-Blancat, 2018). Similarly, according to Wulz and Rainer (2015), the main challenge for mobile students is related to financial conditions. Another interesting yet not surprising finding is that the researchers stated language to be another important source of problems. Previous research supported this finding of the current study (Ivancheva & Gourova, 2011).

Conclusion

The current study investigated the meaning attributed by early-career researchers to academic mobility, the sources of

motivation for mobility, the difficulties and opportunities faced by these researchers during their academic activities.

The contribution of academic mobility to researchers in the early stage of their careers is remarkable. It is understood that most push-pull factors shape the mobility motivations of researchers in the early years of their careers. In particular, it is understood that the conditions in Turkey are effective in the participation of researchers in international mobility at the start of their careers. It would be appropriate to learn about the experiences of the early-career researchers in the mobility process, especially their "research experiences," and to make arrangements in internationalization by taking these into account. In this context, the current study is of great importance in terms of offering better opportunities to researchers seeking international research experience in Turkey.

As a result, perhaps the most important implication of this study is that conducting scientific activities abroad is considered to be extremely positive for researchers. The early-career researchers stated that they better understood how scientific research should be done and gained an epistemological perspective on the production of knowledge in research. This study reveals that international early-career researchers increase their awareness of the opportunities they obtain if they are supported in this understanding. The findings obtained in this study show that mobility experiences abroad contributed to the participants' career journeys, academic perspectives, and academic cultures. In this context, the current study is of great importance as it provides better opportunities for researchers who want to understand the international research experience in Turkey.

In conclusion, I hope that the results of this study will raise awareness about the need to support early-career researchers. It is believed that if researchers in the early years of their careers are supported, their awareness of the opportunities they gain will increase. In line with these inferences, the following suggestions can be made within the framework of the limitations of this study:

- Seminars can be organized for early career researchers to increase awareness about "academic mobility" and encourage them.
- Support funds can be increased for researchers in academic mobility.

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