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THESIS OF THE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTATION OF TURKISH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN HUNGARY, GERMANY, AND THE UNITED STATES

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10.15476/ELTE.2022.129

BUDAPEST 2022

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Studying abroad provides potential benefits to individuals and host countries. However, moving to a foreign country to study also means radical life changes and challenges in the lives of international students (Mesidor & Sly, 2016; Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001). Students need to go through an important period of adaptation to the new country, considering cultural, social, emotional, and academic dimensions (Duru & Poyrazli, 2011), and their ability to function effectively in the new society depends on their adaptation. The cross-cultural adaptation process of students who were born and grew up in one cultural context and maintaining their education in another context differs depending on their culture of origin and the host culture (Duru & Poyrazli, 2011; Yeh & Inose, 2003). Therefore, examining the experiences of students with the same cultural background, but in different contexts is essential to a better understanding of the adaptation experiences that may differ between the host cultures. In this process, the greater the cultural differences between the individual's heritage/home culture and the settlement/host culture, the greater culture conflict this individual might face and the more likely the individual will experience acculturative stress (Ward et al., 2001). With this in mind, this dissertation examined and compared the adaptation experiences of Turkish international students (TIS) who have the same cultural background but study in Hungary, Germany, and the United States. Correspondingly, the author addressed the following research question:

What were lived experiences of TIS in Hungary, Germany, and the United States of America during the cross-cultural adaptation process?

What were the effects of the cultural characteristics of the host countries on the cross-cultural adaptation process of students from the same cultural background?

How did cultural, social, emotional, and academic aspects of the sojourn affect the multidimensional cross-cultural adaptation experiences of TIS?

Constructivist/interpretative philosophical stances have been adopted in this study, which requires trusting the participants' point of view (Creswell, 2013). Also, we preferred the qualitative research method because it allows researchers to explore participants' inner experiences and analyze how meanings are shaped through and within a culture (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The research design adopted an inductive approach for qualitative data analysis that was conducted through in-depth semi-structured interviews consisting of open-ended questions. We used the purposive sampling method when selecting our participants

This research was informed by Ward and colleagues' (2001) and Ward and Geeraert's (2016) theoretical frameworks that describe the cross-cultural adaptation as a dynamic process, and by the literature that focuses on adaptation and acculturation of international students, including TIS. Ward et al. (2001) broadly divided the acculturation process, in which individuals learn to adapt to a new culture, into psychological adaptation and sociocultural adaptation. Psychological and sociocultural adaptations are affected by both individual level (characteristics of both the person and situation) and societal level variables (social, political, economic, and cultural factors of society of both origin and settlement) (Ward et al., 2001). Ward and Geeraert's (2016) have recommended an ecological model for the studying of acculturation-adaptation processes, with different levels – familial, institutional, and societal – of context in both cultures of origin and host culture being taken into account. Understanding the nature and characteristics of the home culture and host culture is essential in the model.

Whereas, in the literature, no model specifically describes the adaptation and acculturation of international students. However, Ward et al. (2001)'s approach considers different dimensions of cross-cultural travelers, such as status (e.g., immigrant, international student, refugee), and situation (e.g., purpose, time-span, type of involvement) (Ward et al., 2001). Also, the focus of the model in which Ward & Geeraert (2016) use the principle of cultural distance is entirely the ecological context in which the cross-cultural adaptation and acculturation of sojourners and immigrants occurs. Therefore, Ward and colleagues' (2001; 2016) theoretical models provide a comprehensive framework to explore and analyze the adaptation process of TIS who sojourned in Hungary, Germany and the Unites States voluntarily and temporarily for education. A total of three studies were conducted for examining cross-cultural adaptation experiences of TIS in three different countries.

Chapter 2
ADAPTATION EXPERIENCES OF TURKISH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN GERMANY

Aim: This study aims to explore the adaptation experiences of TIS in Germany, taking into account the culture-specific (i.e., cultural values and affiliation to the Turkish minority group) and sojourner-specific (i.e., motivation for adaptation) conditions faced by them in Germany, and it fills a crucial gap in the literature by shifting the focus to TIS sojourning in Germany as a growing segment of German international higher education students.

Method: To explore adaptation experiences of TIS in Germany, we chose to use consensual qualitative research (CQR), which is a descriptive, inductive method (Hill, 2015). Hill (2015) emphasized that "this method is particularly good for investigating inner experiences that are not easily observable to outsiders" (p. 486). This study was carried out with 15 volunteer TIS from different German universities.

Findings: The findings of this study showed that TIS' perceptions of German universities differ from their perceptions of Germany itself. The participants' motives for adaptation focused foremost on the academic context, depending on their sojourner status and migration goals and they believed that Germany not only offers them free and high-quality education but also high-level job opportunities. Also, the findings revealed that TIS are exposed to many negative stereotypes owing to being Turkish, Muslim and foreigner and accordingly they reported themselves to be more disadvantaged than many other international student groups in Germany. Due to longstanding social and political turmoil, Turks have been stereotyped as being in a lower class, conditioned by Islam, monochrome (Horrocks & Kolinsky, 1996), oppressive, inferior, and backward (Erensu & Adanli, 2004). Participants, aware of the out-group homogeneity perception of Germans, do not accept to be stigmatized or to be generalized with a low reputation. TIS, culturally belonging to the Turkish minority group in Germany, perceive negative stigmas as a threat to their social identity and consider themselves to be representatives of a modern aspect of Turkey. Also, TIS consider themselves to have higher status than immigrants, and the study's findings suggest that they believe being an international student (sojourner) is a sign, in itself, that they are well educated with a financially stable background. Moreover, TIS in Germany experienced discrimination, but only off-campus. TIS perceptions differentiate between host culture members on- and off-campus. Increased off-campus negative experiences, particularly stereotyping and discrimination, contributed to TIS' motivation to focus more on the academic context and the young locals whom TIS identified as open-minded.

It contributes to adaptation literature as it focuses on defining themes related to TIS, a particular nationality-cultural group that has not been studied in the context of Germany. One contribution involves the findings regarding the impact on one country's international students of disparaging stereotypes and discrimination aimed at a large community of immigrants from the same country. The study also contributes to the extant literature by calling attention to the sharply different experiences of TIS concerning the safe, supportive, and enabling institutional, on-campus context on the one hand, and the much more challenging, discriminative off-campus, larger host society context on the other hand.

Chapter 3

ADAPTATION OF TURKISH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN HUNGARY AND THE UNITED STATES

Aim: This study aims to investigate the adaptation experiences of TIS in Hungary and the United States.

Method: To examine the adaptation experiences of TIS in two different countries, this qualitative study adopted a case study approach which is used to "contribute to our knowledge of the individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena" (Yin, 2014, p. 4). In this study, we define the case as the adaptation experiences of TIS and aimed to understand their adaptation in two different countries. A total of 26 volunteer TIS (14 from Hungary and 12 the United States) participated the study. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, as it is useful in highlighting similarities and differences (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Findings: Its primary importance is that the contextual variables of an adaptation process, which may differ between host countries, and their effects are clearly shown. The study's findings indicated that communication with other students, physical and technological facilities, interaction with school staff, campus climate, the education system implemented, social opportunities and culturally sensitive practices of institutions differentiated the participants' academic motivation and school perception, as well as their psychological and sociocultural adaptation in the host country. In The United States where English is the official language, and all facilities and social opportunities can be found on campus, TIS developed a positive perception of their academic environment. On the other hand, studying in Hungary, which offers EMI programs, poses some serious problems for TIS that do not exist for their co-nationals studying in an English speaking country.

In addition, the two host countries provided different urban facilities for TIS. Some cultural elements bearing Turkish traces in daily life due to the shared historical background and the urban facilities that students had in Hungary facilitated their adaptation experience. Also, easy access to Turkey due to its geographical proximity facilitated adaptation of TIS in Hungary. However, in contrast to the advantages TIS experienced in their daily lives in Hungary, those in the United States reported many challenges, which varied depending on the university's location such as transportation, and climate. Besides, the restriction on relationships with families due to the geographical distance from Turkey caused challenges and stress for TIS in the United States.

Moreover, considering the societal context, the current political atmosphere caused problems for TIS in the United States such as visa issues and Islamophobia. participants in this study reported political conflicts between the United States and Turkey as a challenge in the host country, causing stress and pressure on them. On the other hand, the current, strong political relations between Hungary and Turkey and especially political discourses emphasizing the cultural brotherhood between the two countries contributed to the TIS' perception of low cultural distance and overall satisfaction in Hungary. However, negative past political relations in the two countries' shared history have led to negative stereotypes against Turks. Their experiences due to stereotypes against their ethnic identity due to past political relations made TIS feel humiliated and hindered their adaptation in Hungary.

It is essential to note that this research is the first study on TIS' adaptation in Hungary and the first comparative study on TIS' cross-cultural adaptation in different contexts. Also, our comparative study shed light on the impact of the teaching language and local language being the same or different. To our best knowledge, this has not yet been adequately researched. Additionally, we pointed out the effect of current political relations as well as distal historical interactions between the host countries and home country on the adaptation process of international students. Moreover, we revealed the contribution of both school and urban facilities to the adaptation process and also the role and importance of geographical distance in the adaptation process.

Chapter 4

ADJUSTMENT CHALLENGES AND HELP SEEKING AMONG TURKISH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN THE UNITED STATES

Aim: This study aimed to investigate challenges and help seeking among TIS in the United States during their adjustment process.

Method: Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), a qualitative analytical method widely used in psychology, was chosen to examine adaptation difficulties and help seeking among TIS in the adaptation process in the United States because the focus of the study was to identify themes from the perspective of participants' experiences. The group of participants comprised eight females and seven males living in the United States.

Findings: According to the findings, TIS faced many challenges while living in the United States, including language issues, discrimination, loneliness, financial issues, cultural distance, academic issues, homesickness, and mis perception about Turks. Similar to the findings of previous studies on help seeking among Turkish students in Turkey and the United States, in the present study TIS turned first to their families for emotional help, as a culture-

based attitude. Participants highlighted intimacy and sincerity in relationships with co-nationals as determinants for seeking emotional help from them to cope with negative feelings such as loneliness in the host country.

All the participants living in the United States reported that they had learnt about their respective college counseling services from official sources. They had been informed by an email from the college and by their advisors, and, if necessary, they had even been directed to the counseling services by their advisors. Frequent exposure to such information via different channels positively affected these participants' attitudes and behavior toward the counseling services. Participants considered college counseling services as part of their academic life and sought help from the college counseling services to deal with their academic challenges. They also emphasized that they were, by and large, satisfied with these services.

At the same time, some of the TIS participants in the United States who applied to the counseling services to deal with challenges other than academic issues were not satisfied, because they felt that they were not understood by the counselors, who were unaware of their cultural norms and values. The counselors' cultural insensitivity negatively affected the participants' approach to the counseling services. The findings of the present study may help mental health providers to address the needs of TIS effectively as a specific cultural group in multicultural settings.

Chapter 5
GENERAL DISCUSSION

As a result, the academic setting and opportunities, environmental factors, and social/societal relations offered by the host country to TIS in an ecological context, as well as both physical and cultural distance between the host country and Turkey, differentiated the adaptation experiences of TIS. TIS also had similar experiences in Hungary, Germany, and the United States, but upon in-depth analysis, the content of their contextual experiences differed by the host country. Considering the frameworks in which Ward and colleagues (2001; 2016) used the principle of cultural distance and previous studies (e.g., English, Zhang & Tong, 2021; Ward & Searle, 1991), sojourners experience more difficulties and stress in their lives due to an increase in differences between the country of origin and the host country and this negatively affects both their psychological and sociocultural adaptation. Overall, due to a shared historical background between Hungarians and Turks and the similar environmental conditions (e.g., climate) between Hungary and Turkey, actual daily hassles were less than they had expected. Also, TIS in Hungary perceived similarities with Hungarians in their social relations. Perceived low cultural distance in relations and everyday

life contributed significantly to their cross-cultural adaptation. Conversely, the academic expectations of the students, who had many difficulties in the academic context, mainly due to the language barrier, could not be fully met, and the disappointments experienced negatively affected their overall satisfaction. On the other hand, TIS in the United States experienced many differences in their daily lives, and TIS in Germany and the United States perceived higher cultural distance in their social relationships. However, TIS in Germany and the United States, whose expectations were met in accordance with the aims of the sojourn in the academic context, had high satisfaction. Another important finding is that the closeness of the physical distance corresponding to the 2-3 hours flight time between the host country and Turkey significantly contributed to the psychological well-being of TIS in Germany and Hungary. The results showed that the primary source of emotional support for TIS in all three countries is families. In addition, co-nationals are the best emotional supporters for TIS in the three host countries due to the language barrier and cultural background.

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