

Studying in Turkey: Perceptions of international social studies teacher candidates

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Abstract

The primary aim of this study was to reveal how international social studies teacher candidates perceive/make sense of their experiences in Turkey. The participants were three international social studies teacher candidates studying at an Istanbul university. The data were gathered from semi-structured interviews, with the analysis following content analysis steps. It was found that the international social studies teacher candidates had negative views of Turkey before coming to the country; however, there were positive changes in their perceptions during their time in Turkey, with all believing that they would have gained a great deal by the time they return to their countries. The main achievements that participants believe to earn by studying in Turkey are a qualified/democratic education and citizenship awareness as a reflection of this education.

Keywords: International students, social studies, studying in Turkey, teacher candidates.

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1. Introduction

Because of globalisation, the need for rapid and effective cross-cultural interactions has risen. Furthermore, the escalation in cross-border trade, international education and joint education and business ventures has meant that there has been a significant rise in the need for cross-cultural awareness and understanding. A rising area for the development of cross-cultural understanding has been in education, with international education becoming increasingly popular. In particular, many young people seeking higher education are choosing to study for their undergraduate/graduate degrees outside their home country, usually in countries with better education conditions (Aslanbeigui & Montecinos, 1998; Leutwyler & Meierhans, 2016). Although there are many factors that influence student's study preferences, an expectation/perception of academic quality is generally the most important; however, economic issues such as living, education and social costs in the country are also critical reference points for most students (Trilokekar & Rasmi, 2011), which was exemplified in the International Student Survey (2014) conducted by the Department of Education and Training and Training. With the widespread growth in international education, many universities in many countries are now seeking to attract international students to bolster university income and develop cross-cultural understanding (Bednarek, 1991; Owens, Srivastava & Feerasta, 2011; Sato, 2005; Wit, Ferencz & Rumbley, 2012). As a result of this increased competition, universities are seeking to attract students at education fairs held around the world by offering distinct advantages or by highlighting the benefits of studying in their particular country. Another reason for seeking to attract international students is to contribute to cultural and political integration processes. The European Union, in particular, has developed and implemented cross-border education projects to strengthen the cultural foundations of the union (Deakin, 2013; Juvan & Lesjak, 2011; Mol & Michielsen, 2015).

The decision to study in another country generally depends on the perceived difficulties or advantages. For example, after the September 11 attacks in New York, there was a significant decrease in the number of international students seeking to study in the United States (Borjas, 2002; Choudaha, 2017; Heng, 2017; Terzian & Osborne, 2006); however, after several years, the demand increased again. In contrast, in 2016, because of the domestic political developments in the country, the presidential election and the general atmosphere, there has been a notable decrease in the number of international students (www.insidehighered.com). A similar situation was experienced in Australia in the early 2000s; as a result of the education policies at that time, many people protested about the international students who they saw as 'incompetent and disorderly'. When the verbal and physical bullying of students coming from Southeast Asia increased, the government had to introduce new regulations for the admission of international students (Robertson, 2011). Another country with significant fluctuations in international student policies and the number of international students has been Italy; a country that has cities named after higher education internationalisation education systems such as the Bologna process; the country was forced to make significant changes after global reactions to their international student visa restrictions (Sa & Sabzalieva, 2016). Therefore, a country's policies and practices affect the willingness of international students to study in that country; this also means that the experiences the international student has and the perceptions they return with are extremely important for the continuity of the international student system. Therefore, how international students perceive the foreign education process as well as the meanings they ascribe to the quality of life and education are critical to ensure that international students continue to come to the country.

Over the past 25 years, Turkey has put in concerted efforts to attract international students. From the early 1990s, in parallel with the collapse of the USSR, important steps were taken to attract students from the Central Asian Turkish republics, such as the 'Grand Student Project' in 1992, which sought to attract high school and higher education students from the Turkish republics to Turkey (Collu & Ozturk, 2010). Similarly, since that time, there have been various projects implemented to encourage international students from all over the world to study in Turkey. The Student Selection and Placement Centre of Turkey (OSYM) has noted that the 74,000 international students in Turkey in

2015 came from many countries such as Angola, the USA, the UK, Equatorial Guinea, Bolivia, Afghanistan, Gambia and the Central African Republic.

Studying in another country can have significant benefits as it gives the students unique experiences and develops their ability to deal with and cope with various cultural and educational difficulties (Duru & Poyrazli, 2011). Although some researchers have claimed that the problems experienced by the international students vary from one individual to another, and are mostly related to communication and adaptation (Akande, 1994), it is clear that there are many determinants in this process. The treatment of international students is very important; therefore, there needs to be a good understanding of the possible problems that students from particular cultural backgrounds may face. Studies on international students in Turkey have mostly focused on students from the Central Asian Turkish republics. Ozturk (2009) examined the language problems that students coming from Central Asian Turkish republics had experienced, with a particular focus on their Turkish reading and writing difficulties. Ergin and Turk (2010) also focused on students coming from the Central Asian Turkish republics and explored the roles these students played in relationships between their countries and Turkey. In a similar study, Bayraktaroglu and Mustafayeva (2009) examined the socio-cultural influence of students from the Central Asian Turkish republics on international relations. The Central Asian student adaptation to Turkish life has also been the focus of many studies. Allaberdiyev (2007) and Karaoglu (2007) examined whether the adaptation of international students changed based on certain variables.

However, these Turkish international student studies have tended to mostly deal with students from the Central Asian Turkish republics and have only examined one particular aspect. In general, however, as noted, thousands of students from a wide range of countries are studying in Turkey, with each having different experiences depending on their socio-cultural background. Consequently, there is a significant gap in the literature on international students in Turkey. In the present study, there were no restrictions on participant selection with students from Bangladesh and Mongolia also included in the sample as well as those from the Central Asian Turkish republics.

The primary aim of this study was to reveal what studying in Turkey means for international social studies teacher candidates. The research questions addressed in the study were as follows.

1. What perceptions of Turkey did the international social studies teacher candidates have before coming to the country?
2. What socio-cultural differences did the international social studies teacher candidates experience while studying in Turkey?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of studying in Turkey according to international social studies teacher candidates?
4. Were there any differences in the international social studies teacher candidates' impressions of Turkey before and after coming to the country?

2. Method

2.1. Research design

This study was designed and conducted in accordance with qualitative research methods. Qualitative research that aims to obtain detailed information regarding a research problem which enables the exchange of in-depth data between the researcher and participants through its data-gathering techniques as it is an effective research method for the analysis of people's understanding of the world (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). As this study's aim was to conduct an in-depth analysis of international teacher candidates' experiences in Turkey, it was conducted in accordance with the qualitative research methods.

2.2. Participants

The study participants were three international teacher candidates studying social studies education at a Turkish university. In qualitative research, the selection of participants is of great importance when seeking to obtain meaningful data because qualitative research involves research procedures that seek to obtain in-depth data from a sufficient number of participants (Ambert, Adler, Adler & Detzner, 1995). However, what is important is the determination of 'sufficient number'. In the literature, although there have been different approaches with respect to the number of participants in qualitative research, what basically matters is whether rich and in-depth data are gathered (Tuckett, 2004). Since the primary criterion used for participant selection in qualitative research is the ability to obtain in-depth, meaningful data, purposive sampling, rather than random sampling, is more commonly used (Marshall, 1996). Purposive sampling was employed in this study, because the aim was to gather in-depth data about the differences between education in the international students' home countries and in Turkey in international students who were voluntarily available to attend the interviews. The information on the study participants is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Home country	Socio-economic status
Ramazan	Male	Bangladesh	Very low
Mahmedov	Male	Turkmenistan	High
Aylina	Female	Mongolia	Middle

2.3. Data collection

As in-depth data collection is the basis of data collection procedures in qualitative research, in this study, semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data collection method. Interviews are an effective method for determining the participant's understanding as they can reveal how they understand the world (Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Each participant was interviewed for around an hour, for which the research questions were taken as the basis for the preparation of participant questions to ensure accurate and deep descriptions. However, due to the nature of semi-structured interviews, as the pre-determined questions are generally for guidance only (Agee, 2009), different issues and contexts were also touched upon during the natural flow of the meaning exchange between the researcher and the participants.

2.4. Data analysis

The participant interviews were first transcribed, after which the transcriptions were read as a whole in light of the research questions. The participants' views/answers towards each research question were then examined in detail and the answers coded based on similarities and differences (Basic, 2003). Based on these codes, several categories were developed for the next step in the analysis. These categories were accompanied by direct zero participant quotes, and in this way, consistency was assured between the codes and the categories.

3. Results

3.1. Perceptions of Turkey before coming to the country

The three international social studies teacher candidates interviewed in this study were asked about their perception of Turkey before coming to the country. They were asked to describe the socio-cultural, economic and educational images of Turkey in their home countries and how these images had affected their decision to study in Turkey.

The participants' answers revealed that the most obvious characteristic about Turkey was religion. All three participants stated that before they came to Turkey, they had visualised a country in which religion was dominant in both the political regime and social life. However, there were some differences between the participants. Two participants stated that their perception of the dominance of religion raised a question mark as to their study preferences, whereas the other participant, Ramazan from Bangladesh, stated that the primary reason for preferring Turkey was that it was a Muslim country, as follows:

I was born and grew up in a Muslim country. Therefore, I felt Turkey would be more comfortable in terms of food, the concept of religion, and pretty much everything else. If I had gone to a non-Muslim country, everything would have been different. In Europe, for instance, I would have to consider whether the food was halal or not if I wanted to eat in a restaurant, but in a Muslim country it is OK as I wouldn't have to think about it because they would have the same religion.

Ramazan frequently pointed out that because Turkey was a Muslim country, this facilitated his adaptation. The other participants stated that others had recommended not go to Turkey because of the religious pressure. Mahmedov from Turkmenistan highlighted the western media publications on this issue in Central Asia and commented that the knowledge about Turkey in Turkmenistan was based on western media publications, in which Turkey was described as a country with constant domestic disturbances, in which religion was used as a tool of pressure that could even turn violent. He further stated that due to this image of Turkey, his family and friends objected to his idea of studying in Turkey, as in the following:

...Our teachers at school recommended that we study at a university abroad. Some of them encouraged us but some criticized the idea. They said Turkey was a very Islamic country and there was pressure and we would have difficulties... We came to Aksaray by underground, which was difficult, and we vowed to stay close to each other as there could be an attack on us because it was an Islamic country and, like Afghanistan, was unsafe... Before I came here, one of my teachers who had once visited Turkey told me not to shake hands with girls, or even say 'Hi!', or try to talk to them when I went to the university, otherwise they would kill me. My mother didn't want me to do this, she was scared. She said she could send me a university there, or a university in Moscow...

Mahmedov's statements indicated that there was a common image of 'fear' in Turkey in the Turkmen society, with the understanding that Turkey was a Muslim state/society was influential in this perception. Because of these perceptions regarding safety and religion, students who wanted to study in Turkey were strictly warned not to. A similar perception was underlined by Aylina from Mongolia. She described her perceptions toward Turkey before she came here as follows: '*...We knew Turkey was a Muslim country, like Saudi Arabia...'*, '*...a country where religious life is dominant, that's what we thought about Turkey...'*. Aylina also stated that Turkey was known as a country where religion was dominant. However, different from Mahmedov, Aylina said that she was told that there was no pressure regarding religious life before she came to Turkey; however, people objected to her study plans for Turkey by pointing out other difficulties: '*The objections of those around me were not because of the religious pressure, but because of the difficulties of studying in Turkey such as being in foreign culture and having to go to prep school. They told me I needed to go to prep school for 2–3 years, and those who came here could graduate after 9–10 years. There were friends of mine who wanted to come and study, but didn't because of these arguments'*.

When the participants were asked about their image of Turkey before coming to study, the most dominant impression was that it was 'a religious country'. However, as shown in Table 2, this perception had a positive influence for one participant, but was a problem for those participants from non-Muslim backgrounds who had faced objections from family and friends. Therefore, the

perception of Turkey as a religious country which has elements of violence and pressure could be a dominant perception for potential international teacher candidates coming to Turkey.

Table 2. Participants' perception regarding religion in Turkey before coming to study, and its effect on their preferences

	Aylina	Mahmedov	Ramazan
The perception that Turkey is a Muslim/religious country	Negative perspective, negative influence on the preference	Negative perspective, negative influence on the preference	Positive perspective, positive influence on the preference

3.2. Socio-cultural differences experienced while studying in Turkey

In this section, the socio-cultural differences/difficulties that the international social studies teacher candidates experienced in Turkey are examined.

The effect of religion on the society was again emphasised by the participants as one of the main socio-cultural differences. In particular, clothing that has religious meanings created confusion in the participants. For instance, the teacher candidates from Turkmenistan and Mongolia stated that they were surprised that the women wore head scarves and were unable to make sense of this clothing style. Aylina expressed her surprise, as in the following: *'There are women with head scarves that we see in our environment as well as when we go out. We were shocked; how could that happen in hot weather? Everyone looked like each other. Just like you say that all Japanese people are alike, it is the same'*.

Mahmedov stated similar views:

As I told you just before, since we knew about countries like Turkey only from the media, the picture there is like this; fights, then the sounds of prayer calls, and then the images of women who cover their whole bodies with black clothing except their eyes. When I first came here, I got the shivers when I saw them. I was wondering how the social life of these people would be. When they want to work, are they allowed to do their job with this attire or do they drive covered with that clothing almost completely, and what is their place in the society? I had thoughts like these. When I saw them on the streets, I felt anxious because there was always this fear against them, as if it is something like terrorism.

As can be inferred from the participants' statements, the covering of the head by women surprised the teacher candidates from Turkmenistan and Mongolia. Based on their reactions to this issue, there were seen to be significant differences in Turkey because of the Islamic social practices related to faith. Mahmedov pointed out these differences, as follows: *'There is no such thing in our principles of faith. There is one thing that communism wants to impose on us; everybody thinks the same way. It affects us, it still does. We don't have these things in our traditions. Maybe only a few people, but we see them as narrow-minded, from an underdeveloped section of the society, those who still care about old traditions'*. The differences in clothing were not only about women but also included men. Similarly, Mahmedov expressed his surprise about men's clothing by saying: *'...For instance, I was surprised with this; a man had a beard and was wearing religious clothing. We thought he only needed to wear that in the mosque, like a soldier's uniform. I was thinking what if this man is working somewhere, maybe he is a civil servant, how would others react to this? In our country, every place has its own uniform...'*

Another difference that the participants noted in common was about the food culture. This difference was expected and foreseeable as it is normal that the food cultures differ based on geographical-climatic characteristics. In this respect, the teacher candidate from Bangladesh stated that he had difficulty because of his habit of eating spicy food, which is an important characteristic of Indian East culture: *'...the food was very different. Because in my home country we always have spicy*

food, here it is usually served without spice. I was telling myself how I would manage with that kind of food'. Aylina from Kazakhstan expressed her surprise regarding the culture of eating bread, as follows: 'Also, we were surprised with the amount of bread that Turkish people consume. They don't eat their meal without bread. This is not the case in our culture, at least not that much. We were really surprised with that, we were saying why they needed a break when they had their meal'.

The concept of family was another socio-cultural difference that the international social studies teacher candidates experienced. The participant from Turkmenistan pointed out this difference and stated that the Turkish family structure was stronger and individuals were more bound to each other, as follows:

There is a family tie in Turkey, but not in our country. When individuals reach the age of 18, they do whatever they want and say that they are independent. In Turkey, the situation is different. Relations with parents and relatives are different as well as respect and love. In our society, communism still has an influence on the society. You tell a man that his child should do something, he says he doesn't care. He wonders why he should look after the child after they leave home at the age of 18. Therefore, they don't get married at once and they don't want to have children just after they get married. But in Turkey, religion gets in the way at this point. Starting a family, loving parents and raising children.

Two of the participants touched upon the socio-cultural differences they encountered during their time in Turkey and said that they found two men shaking hands warmly very strange: '*When we first landed at the airport, it was very crowded, and some men were greeting each other by clinking their heads or kissing each other. I was surprised to see that. In our country, you give your hand to the other person only if you are close with him. Even now, when I go to my hometown, we involuntarily greet friends from Turkey like that, and those around us find it strange*'.

The participants said that they were surprised with the style of religious clothing, the food culture and with men shaking hands; however, they found the socio-cultural structures were generally in parallel, so they did not have many other difficulties in adapting to their environments after solving the language problem.

Table 3. Socio-cultural differences observed while studying in Turkey

The belief system and its reflections on daily life
Differences between the food cultures
Differences in interpersonal relationships

3.3. Advantages and disadvantages of studying in Turkey

In this section, the participants' views on the advantages and disadvantages of studying in Turkey are examined.

The participant from Turkmenistan highlighted democratic education as one of the advantages of being a university student in Turkey. He stated that the education system in his country did not have a place for concepts such as objection and suggesting different ideas, but Turkey was more comfortable in this respect, which extended his vision: '*...I can access a variety of resources here. There is a democratic education system here and I had many foreign friends as well as Turkish friends and therefore, I was able to be more enlightened than in Turkmenistan. Another thing is that Turkmenistan is now a country in transition from communism to capitalism; therefore, I will have learned many things that they will learn. This is a great advantage for me*'. Another outcome was that the Turkmen participant said he gained historical awareness. This aspect emerged as a common observation. The participants stated that when they first came to Turkey, they were unable to make sense of the historical buildings they saw, but when they thought about it, they understood why these buildings

were valuable and why they should be preserved. The Bangladeshi participant stated his view on this issue as follows:

...Early on, I didn't go out a lot to see the city. That's why I didn't see a lot of historical places. But after I visited them, I asked myself why they kept them and didn't demolish them. Then I asked my friend why that was the case, and looked it up online. They said, for instance, it was 600 years old, very, very old, then I liked it. Then, it was the summer, and people came and visited these places...

The participants also highlighted the quality of the instructors as an advantage of being a university student in Turkey as their thinking improved and their horizons expanded. One participant expressed his view as follows: '*...Plus, some of the instructors were so good that they taught everything in detail and thus I'm able to think in ways that were not possible before*'.

With regard to university social life, all participants had positive views. They said that their class mates were quite warm and helpful in both in-class communication and extra-curricular activities and that they only had difficulty when learning the language. Moreover, due to the influence of this warm interpersonal communication, the teacher candidates who had regretted coming to Turkey to study at the beginning and had been planning to return to their home countries had changed their minds and completed their education. However, the international teacher candidates complained that they did not see the understanding and helpful approaches they received from their classmates echoed in the university administration:

I was regretful when I first came. Well, in my country, you go and talk to the instructor at the university and they help out international students by implementing a different program for them. I was the only foreigner. I couldn't understand the classes and was bored. I talked to the instructors and they told me they didn't have anything to do with this. In my country, they have special treatment for foreigners and there is an instructor just for this. In the simplest terms, for instance, when we went to the registrar's office, they didn't know anything about our process and made it difficult for us. I was trying to go and talk to the instructors at the faculty and they misunderstood me; they thought I was asking for a favour, but I only wanted a personal evaluation. I wasn't on the same level as them and even though I have been speaking Turkish for three years, it was still not enough. I have problems in writing particularly because I can't think and write in Turkish; I think in Russian and try to translate it to Turkish, and therefore, there is a loss of meaning.

As can be inferred from the participant's statements, the international students who come to our universities to study encounter various administrative problems. In addition, the participants stated that the university buildings were not as modern and new as they expected, and they were disappointed in this regard.

Table 4. Advantages and disadvantages of studying in Turkey

Advantages	Disadvantages
Democratic education	Problems due to university administration
Development of critical thinking skills	Language problems due not speaking Turkish fluently
Quality of faculty members	Communication problems
Good in-class communication	Physical inadequacies of university buildings
Development of historical conscience	

3.4. Image of Turkey before and after coming to study

This section examines whether the participants' image of Turkey before they came to the country changed while studying in the Turkish universities.

The participants had parallel views on the image of Turkey they had had before they came. All three participants said that they knew Turkey as ‘a society and state where religion is dominant’. However, two of the participants regarded the religious factor as a problem, while the third participant said that it was why he preferred Turkey. The participants who had come to Turkey with a fear of religious pressure stated that as this fear disappeared, they had a more positive image of Turkey. One of the participants said that their fear started to fade when they went to Taksim early in their time in Turkey: ‘...as we knew it as an Islamic country, I mean like Afghanistan, where there is no safety. The other day we were walking on the streets, we went to the Istiklal Avenue, and we were surprised and our prejudices disappeared over time. It’s a developed country...’. The views of the Bangladeshi participant were consistent because the religion was a positive reason for his preference to study in Turkey. This participant who had an image of a country where the influence of religion was seen in everyday social life stated that the views he had before coming were confirmed. Therefore, he was comfortable in Turkey and was easily able to adapt to the society.

Overall, the international social studies teacher candidates initially had varying non-positive perceptions of Turkey; however, after 5 years, these perceptions had changed, with some of their friends coming to Turkey to study based on their positive recommendations. All the three participants said that they would be sorry to go back to their countries after completing their education and would miss life in Turkey: ‘I think I will miss being here. I sometimes think about it like it was really boring at first, but now it is very different. I hope I will be in touch with my friends here. We have friends here and the instructors at school. I want to take them to Turkmenistan and show them around. I mean a part of my heart will stay here’.

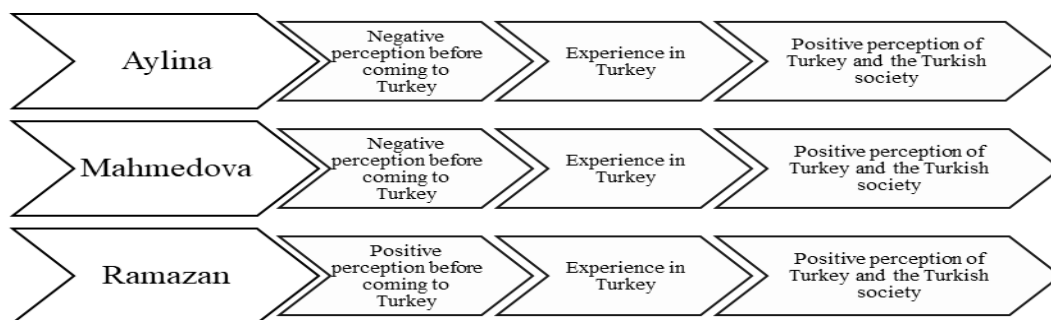


Figure 1. Changes in the participants’ image of Turkey

The international students who had had certain fears and reservations before coming to Turkey had developed a positive perception after 5 years.

4. Discussion

This study focused on international social studies teacher candidate’s experiences in Turkey to assess how studying in Turkey had affected their understanding of the world. The in-depth interviews based on the four research questions revealed the changes in their perceptions regarding Turkey and elucidated their thoughts on the advantages and disadvantages of studying in Turkey.

Several of the participants had negative perceptions of life in Turkey before arriving in the country, with the participants from Turkmenistan and Mongolia stating that they had faced objections from their families because of a fear of religious pressure. Based on this finding, it could be argued that students should carefully evaluate the socio-cultural characteristics of a country. A similar result was reported by Mewee, Nyland and Shao (2010), who found that when students decided on a country for their education, their families played an important role, and the most influential priorities were usually safety and cultural adaptation. Another finding revealed in the current study was that the

teacher candidates who had negative perceptions of Turkey before they came to the country had more positive perceptions after spending time in the country.

The participants' views on the advantages and disadvantages of studying in Turkey were also examined from various aspects, and various findings were revealed. In this regard, the problems the international students encountered in Turkey and the outcomes they gained were indirectly expressed. The primary problems all participants had in common were the language and communication problems they initially experienced. There is no doubt that living or studying in a society with a different and unfamiliar language is difficult. In many studies on this topic, international students have mentioned language issues as the main problem. Collu and Ozturk (2010) came to a similar conclusion in their study, in which the participants had stated that the primary problem they had in Turkey was with the language. However, it should be noted that the participants' friends and the people around them showed a constructive and helpful approach to this language problem, which, they said, led to a change in their image of Turkey. Considering the effect possible language and communication problems may have on the international students' academic achievement (Jochems, Snippe, Smid & Verweij, 1996; Karuppan & Barari, 2011), the findings revealed in this study could be seen as a positive aspect of international student education in Turkey. This result overlapped with several findings from previous studies. Bayraktaroglu and Mustafayeva (2009) found that the international students did not have any feelings of exclusion in the classroom or within the society. Sen (2008) also found that the international students had experienced a very positive and friendly atmosphere in their classes. Hughes (2013) examined the problems and experiences of international students and their language communication in the use of the library by international students in two Australian universities and found that although the international students faced various language and communication problems, solutions were found because of the positive approach of the staff. Duru and Poyrazli (2011) concluded that as the language and communication skills of Turkish students studying in the US improved, the discrimination they were exposed to and other problems decreased. Robert and Dunworth (2012), in another study focused on possible international students' language and communication problems, found that the primary factor for the solution of any problems was the need for the university to be student centred, and pointed out that university staff should pay attention to cultural differences so that the international students do not experience communication problems. The attitude of instructors and university staff was also mentioned as a difficulty by the participants in the study. In particular, they emphasised that they were unable to be as competent as their Turkish classmates because of language problems, and that there were times when the instructors were not willing to assist them overcome these problems. This was also consistent with Vu and Doyle (2014) who described the experiences of Vietnamese students studying in New Zealand, and found that the instructors did not make the necessary effort to solve the problems the students initially encountered.

Based on the findings in this study, the participants did not experience any discrimination or negative attitudes other than the language/communication problems. In this sense, although it can be argued that the international students studying in Turkey are not specifically exposed to any racism or discrimination, this could be related to the characteristics of the participants; because the participants were Muslims, the possibility of religious discrimination was not an issue. It is suggested that this finding be examined in the light of findings from studies that had a wider diversity of participants (Ben & Tsur, 2009; Brown & Brown, 2012; Liu & Winder, 2012) in which it was found that international student' cultural identities deeply affected their experiences of discrimination in the country in which they were studying.

Another negative issue raised by the international social studies teacher candidates was the physical inadequacy of the university buildings. Those from Middle Asia in particular stated that they had expected newer and more modern university buildings before they had come to Turkey and were disappointed when seeing the actual facilities. One of the reasons for this disappointment may have

been because they were studying in an established Turkish university that had been operating for a long time and also because many of the university buildings in their countries were quite new.

The advantages of studying in Turkey varied depending on the world view of the participant. The Turkmen participant stated that he had lived in a very disciplined and authoritarian society until he came to Turkey; therefore, for him, the biggest advantage of studying in Turkey was the 'democratic education' and the chance to improve his 'complaining' skills. He also stated that his time in Turkey has taught him how to be respectful to those wearing different clothing not familiar to him. Similarly, another change/outcome was observed in the participant from Mongolia. She said she had been initially surprised at seeing women with head scarves and was afraid of them; she also was critical that students with head scarves were not admitted to universities, and argued that this was their right. The participants also briefly discussed the transformations they had gone through, with all stating that the more democratic and respectful education was the most dominant characteristic of their university education in Turkey. This result was also consistent with Tarry (2011), which was focused on Thai students studying in the UK, who found that all students had experienced a mental transformation during their education. Nylan (2012) also examined Saudi Arabian students studying in Australia and found that the participants had experienced many cultural and mental changes/transformations during their education. Cheung and Xu (2014) examined the attitudes of Chinese students studying in the US about going back to their country and found that because of the academic and personal development they had experienced in the US, they felt that it would be somewhat difficult to return to China.

Overall, while the international social studies teacher candidates had had reservations regarding certain issues before coming to Turkey, they had developed a more positive perception during their time here. Furthermore, while studying in a Turkey university had positive aspects in terms of teaching style, there were continuing problems with communication and with the university administration. Generally, however, after overcoming their initial fears about studying in Turkey, all participants stated that they would miss Turkey when they left.

Based on the findings from this study and associated recent studies, the following suggestions are offered to interested practitioners and researchers:

Researchers should include international students studying in different cities in Turkey to gather data that have a meaningful variety of socio-cultural interactions. In addition, quantitative studies with a higher level of participants would contribute to the literature.

For practitioners, university and local authority administrators need to be trained in the needs of international students. As inferred from the findings of the present study, host countries' attitudes and practices toward international students are of utmost importance in attracting increasing numbers of international students.

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