

“I Am Not an Immigrant. I Am an International Student:” A Qualitative Study of Adaptation Experiences of Turkish International Students in Germany

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ABSTRACT

This study uses the consensual qualitative research method and examines the adaptation process of 15 Turkish international students at different German universities. The results of this study yielded four primary domains of adaptation experiences: the perceptions of Germany, adaptation challenges, the contributing factors in adaptation experiences, and attitudes toward counseling services. Implications for counseling practice and future directions are discussed in light of the results of this study.

Keywords: adaptation, college counseling, consensual qualitative method, sojourner, Turkish international students

According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute of Statistics [UNESCOIS] (2020), Germany was one of the most popular countries with more than 311,000 international students in 2018. Turkey ranks within the top 10 countries that send students to Germany for education, and the number of Turkish international students (TIS) at German universities has increased consistently over the past 10 years (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2018). Germany’s physical proximity to Turkey and possible job

opportunities, as well as the high reputation of German universities, are factors that attract TIS (Suoglu, 2012). Further, Germany's public higher education institutions have been providing greater diversity in fields of study and have waived tuition fees since 2014 (Hüther & Krucken, 2018). Thus, the free education offered in various fields by the highly reputable universities of a country geographically close to Turkey plays a key role in making German higher education more attractive to TIS.

Despite the growing number of TIS sojourning to Germany for educational purposes, no research was found about how they experience the cross-cultural adaptation. Therefore, this research study focuses on the adaptation experiences of TIS in Germany while considering their cultural and educational backgrounds. The knowledge gained has the potential to contribute to the existing literature on the culture-specific experiences of international students to better address their needs and enrich their cross-cultural experiences. 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 regarding 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. It also makes recommendations regarding the role of the universities in helping TIS' adaptation in this under-investigated circumstance. Knowledge about the TIS' experiences in Germany may provide important implications and inform college counselors working with them at German universities, in the delivery of culturally relevant and effective counseling services.

Specifically, the purpose of this research study was to investigate the adaptation experiences of TIS in Germany and fill 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. Accordingly, in the light of culture-specific issues, there is a need for an in-depth exploration to better understand the adaptation experiences of TIS. A review of the existing literature on the adaptation of international students led us to addressing the following research questions:

- 1) What are TIS' perceptions regarding Germany?
- 2) What are the challenges in the adaptation process of TIS in Germany?
- 3) What are the contributing factors to the adaptation process of TIS in Germany?
- 4) What are the attitudes of TIS toward the college counseling services as a contributing factor in the adaptation process?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study was informed by the literature that focuses on the adaptation of Turkish international students, Turks in Germany, and a theoretical framework developed by Ward and colleagues that describes the cross-cultural adaptation as a dynamic process (Ward et al., 2001). Each of these is described as follows:

Adaptation of Turkish International Students

Most of the existing literature concerns studies conducted in the United States, and they provide insights about important components of TIS' adaptation. Among such studies, Duru and Poyrazli (2007) demonstrated that higher levels of social connectedness, good English language competency, and being open to new experiences are associated with a lower level of acculturative stress. In another study, Duru and Poyrazli (2011) showed that, in the United States, TIS studying for more years reported lower levels of adjustment difficulties, and Turkish students with higher levels of perceived discrimination had a harder time in their new social environment, experiencing additional adjustment difficulties. Also, Burkholder (2014) indicated that Americans' misperceptions about Turks as Arabs and their prejudices toward Islam affected the TIS' overall experience in the United States. Besides, Bektas and colleagues (2009) studied the psychological adaptation of TIS on U.S. university campuses and explained that perceived social support from co-nationals significantly contributed to their adaptation. In addition, Kilinc and Granello (2003), in researching the life satisfaction and help-seeking attitudes of TIS in the United States, found that experiencing discrimination possibly caused their homesickness, and TIS' friends were their primary source of psychological support in the U.S. experience. Despite this profusion of U.S.-based literature, the adaptation of TIS sojourning in Germany for education is yet to be studied.

Turks in Germany

The Turkish-West German labor recruitment agreement was signed in 1961 and has led to the largest population of Turks outside of Turkey (İçduygu, 2012). Since then, their number has continued to grow and now, at more than 7 million individuals, Turkish immigrants constitute the largest minority group in Germany (Zestos & Cooke, 2020). Turks in Germany are often exposed to negative attitudes and are targeted for discrimination (Greitemeyer & Schwab, 2014). In addition, they are stereotyped in Germany as being uneducated and religious (Horrocks & Kolinsky, 1996). Issues around Turkish immigration are frequently discussed in German media and on academic platforms. Therefore, besides an examination of their adaptation experiences and the culture-specific (i.e., cultural values and affiliation to the Turkish minority group) as well as sojourner-specific (i.e., motivation for adaptation) conditions of TIS in Germany, the impact of the generally negative stereotypes of Turkish immigrants in this country should also be considered.

Theoretical Framework

To explore the adaptation experiences of TIS in Germany, this study is informed by Ward et al.'s (2001) conceptual framework that describes sojourning as a dynamic process for students and local individuals. This framework argues that there are two distinct types of adaptation: (a) psychological adaptation and (b) sociocultural adaptation (Ward et al., 2001). Psychological adaptation signifies emotional satisfaction with life and feelings of psychological well-being during the cross-cultural transition (Ward et al., 2001). Sociocultural adaptation describes an individual's competency and ability to fit in or to negotiate the new cultural milieu (Ward et al., 2001). This approach considers different dimensions of cross-cultural travelers, such as status (e.g., immigrant, international student, refugee) and situation (e.g., purpose, timespan, type of involvement) (Ward et al., 2001). Therefore, this model provides a comprehensive framework to explore and analyze the adaptation process of TIS who sojourned in Germany voluntarily and temporarily for education.

METHOD

To explore the 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). Essential to its use is the need to stay close to the participants' narratives and stories in order to fully understand the data (Hill, 2015). It is, therefore, well suited to the in-depth and rich descriptions of the psychological processes involved in this study and helps us to explore the phenomenon.

Sample

To reach the target sample, recruitment flyers including detailed information about the study were disseminated through social media groups consisting of Turkish people living in Germany. The sample size recommended by the CQR method is 8 to 15 individuals (Hill, 2015). This study was carried out with 15 volunteer TIS from different German universities, consisting of five individuals with a bachelor's degree, six with a master's degree, and four with a Ph.D. The individuals who participated in this study had been studying in Germany for a minimum of one year and a maximum of four years at the time of data collection. The participants' age (seven males and eight females) ranged from 20 to 30 years. All the participants had spent their lives in Turkey until they moved to Germany for education. In addition, four of the participants defined their German language proficiency as intermediate level and 11 defined it as upper-intermediate level.

Researchers

The research team for this study consisted of two social psychologists and two clinical psychologists. Consistent with the CQR method, one of the researchers participated in the study as an auditor and the other three researchers formed the primary team. All of us had experienced counseling with international students and were also familiar with the literature in the area of acculturation, adjustment, and adaptation. Prior the study, we were trained on the CQR method. Although bias in the CQR method is minimized due to teamwork, each study takes place in a certain cultural context, and each member develops a particular way of thinking about the data (Hill, 2015). As a whole team, we discussed and reported our biases and expectations regarding the potential findings of the study prior to data collection.

Data Collection Tool

Ethical approval to conduct this study was received from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). We created a data collection form to record information for each TIS, including their arrival time in the host country, age, gender, educational background, family background, language competence, etc. Based on adaptation literature related to international students (e.g., Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Ward et al., 2001), a semi-structured interview protocol involving open-ended questions was prepared as is typical of the CQR method. Then, we applied a pilot study to two TIS in Germany who were not involved in the study; based on their feedback, some of the interview questions were revised to make them more understandable. After that, we reorganized the order of some questions and finalized the protocol, which included four question groups that focused on the following subjects: (a) perceptions and feelings; (b) challenges, problems, or stressors faced initially, later, and presently; (c) Turkish versus German culture; and (d) relationship networks, resources, and coping strategies.

Data Collection Process

Prior to the Skype interviews held at the volunteers' convenience, information and a consent form were sent to them via email, and, for consistency, all interviews were conducted by the same researcher. Depending on the participants' preference, the researcher, a native Turkish speaker, conducted the interviews in Turkish. The interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants. Each interview lasted about 60 to 90 min, after which the researcher wrote notes about the interviewee's impressions to provide further details and help interpret the results based on the data analysis. In addition, although the interviewer referred to participants by their name during interviews, neither their names nor any identifying features were subsequently used. The participants' names were replaced by codes, that is, 01, 02... to 15 with the prefix "G" for Germany. Therefore, cases are referred to by the codes G01, G02 etc. While transcribing, expressions such as "ahh" "hmm" were deleted. We translated all

data into English, individually, and we then met to reach a consensus on the translations. Afterward, a professional transcription service checked for clarity and error in them.

Analysis

Each step of the intensive and long data analysis process of CQR requires continuously examining the raw data to obtain multiple perspectives and reach a consensus on these multiple perspectives, and intra-team trust is essential in this process (Hill, 2015). Accordingly, we conducted a qualitative analysis that employed the procedure recommended by Hill (2015). First, the primary team examined the data independently and formed the domains, which are meaningful topics that arise from the content of the interviews (Hill, 2015). Second, the primary team came together to prepare an agreed list of domains. Third, the primary team determined the core ideas for each domain that were abstracted from the participants' responses in each case. Thus, we were able to reflect the essence of the participants' utterances and, working independently, demonstrate their meanings. The primary team then met again and continued discussion until a consensus was reached. During objective elimination of the excess data, we paid thorough attention to the language usage of the participants to be able to convey their meanings precisely.

Audit

Several times, the auditor carefully read the domains and core ideas and provided feedback related to the sufficiency of the information. The team then made any consequent changes that were necessary within the domains and core ideas.

Cross-Analysis

The next step, following the work on individual cases, involved the primary team meeting to determine any similarities in the core ideas of each domain across all the cases and to examine any patterns. These patterns were labeled as categories (Hill, 2015), and the team placed each core idea in its relevant category (or categories). The same individual who audited the domains and core ideas audited the cross-analysis and presented her feedback to the primary team a few times, resulting in the primary team reviewing the raw materials and making any necessary changes through several rounds of feedback. Then, we all came together again to establish an agreed and final version of all categories and, lastly, the categories were labeled as "general," "typical," or "variant," depending on how often they had been noted.

RESULTS

This section is organized based on the results regarding each research question. First, an overview of the cross-analysis of the interviews with TIS is provided in

Table 1 with the summary of domains, categories, and subcategories. Following Hill's (2015) criteria, case frequencies are nominated "general," "typical," or "variant," as stated earlier. In the cross-analysis, "general" means applicable to 13 to 15 cases, "typical" means applicable to 8 to 12 cases, and "variant" means applicable to three to seven cases in our study. Cases applicable to only two were ignored because they did not represent the sample, as suggested by Hill (2015). As shown in Table 1, the analysis was conducted in four domains based on these results; as Hill et al. (2005) recommends, at least one example for each category was chosen to be illustrated in the text. Accordingly, each research question is presented with a major theme capturing these domains.

Table 1: Summary of Domains, Categories, and Subcategories from the Cross-Analysis of the Interviews with Turkish International Students (N = 15)

Domain, category, and subcategory	Frequency
Perceptions of Germany	
Cheapest but the best education system	General
Better job opportunities	Variant
Germany is a multicultural country	General
A safe and free country	General
Two different lives, on- and off-campus	Typical
Challenges	
Cold and cloudy weather	General
Language proficiency	General
Negative stereotypes	Typical
Germans consider all foreigners as immigrants	Typical
Germans stigmatize Turks as uneducated	Typical
Germans stigmatize Turks as conservative	Typical
Discrimination	Typical
Academic stress	Typical
Homesickness	Variant
Cultural distance	Typical
The contributing factors in the adaptation process	
Coping strategies	
Acceptance	Typical
Focusing on the academic setting and avoidance of generalization	General
Problem-focused coping strategy	Typical
Seeking social support from family and friends	Typical

Domain, category, and subcategory	Frequency
Support system	
Supportive family	General
Supportive heterogenous peer network	General
Supportive school structure	General
Attitudes toward counseling services	
Negative attitudes toward counseling services	Variant
Having misperception about counseling services	Variant
Lack of information about counseling services	Typical

Note: General = applicable to all cases or all but two of the cases are considered; Typical = applicable to more than half of the cases; Variant = applicable to at least three (Hill, 2015).

Perceptions of Germany Domain

According to data analysis, participants' general perception of Germany was largely positive at the levels of country and academic institution. Initially, participants generally believed that they received the cheapest but the best education in Europe, which is their main motivation in Germany. For example, G01 reported, "My university is the best in Europe for my subject. There is no other country which offers free [no tuition fee] and such high-quality education with top-ranking universities."

A variant category emerged from the data in this domain. According to the participants' perceptions, Germany is a very developed country and it offers job opportunities as well as a very prestigious degree that provides high-level job opportunities worldwide. G05 explained,

After graduation, I can find a top job anywhere in the world through having a highly prestigious German degree. My dream is to gain experience in a famous German company such as BMW or Mercedes and then return to Turkey.

The participants noted that this perception led to the idea of continuing their lives in Germany or another developed country for a while after graduating from university.

Further, participants typically acknowledged the intercultural opportunities to be gained from involvement with the various peoples, religions, and cultures of Germany and its multicultural environment is potentially as important for their personal development as their formal education. In the words of G06:

People of all cultures, religions and races live here together. So, studying here is more than only having a degree, and it is an opportunity for intercultural experiences and getting to know the world better. I have

improved my language, intercultural, interpersonal and communication skills that are necessary for my self-development and future business life.

Besides, all of the participants stated that they thought that Germany was a safe and free country, especially when compared with Turkey. In the words of G10:

I feel more secure and also free here. While expressing my opinions openly in Germany, I would hesitate to do so in Turkey due to social and political pressure. Also, I can walk the streets late at night, whereas this would not be possible in Turkey.

Moreover, participants typically defined their experiences in academic settings differently to their experiences in societal settings. Therefore, they stated that their interpersonal relationships and reactions differed on- and off-campus. As G13 noted:

Campus culture is different to, and easier than the one outside. Some locals, especially older Germans, are not as flexible and open-minded as local students and university staff. Consequently, our relationships and communications with others may differ on- and off-campus. We spend most of our lives on-campus and while off campus, it is possible to be exposed to prejudice and discrimination.

Accordingly, despite some negative experiences, especially off-campus, students developed a positive perception of Germany and did not report a negative perception that would demotivate them in the adaptation process.

Challenges Domain

According to data analysis, all participants reported more than one source of stress in their adaptation process. First, participants generally defined cold and cloudy weather as an important challenge that caused them to feel depressed. G02 reported, "There is no sunshine even in summer. It is so depressing and affects me so much. I feel like a zombie that is living in the dark." Also, all participants stated that the lack of language proficiency caused interpersonal problems, with the language barrier affecting their social life more than their academic life. As participants reported, they could not express themselves sufficiently, which caused superficiality or misunderstanding in their relationships. For example, in the words of G10, "Sometimes, I cannot correctly express exactly what I wanted to say due to my limited vocabulary. This makes my claims less significant. Also, I sometimes feel anxious as using the wrong words can cause problems."

Moreover, participants typically reported that negative stereotyping about being Turks, Muslims, and immigrants is a major source of stress in their daily life and therefore they are at a disadvantage compared with many other international students. Three subcategories emerged from this category: First, participants typically mentioned that Germans considered all foreigners as immigrants. They emphasized that they were exposed to some negative

stereotyping, not because of being Turkish but due to being foreign. For example, G07 said:

Germans do not think of foreigners as international students, that is the problem. I am not an immigrant; I am an international student and have come here for education. They get benefits from my being here but still prefer to be rude.

Second, participants typically mentioned that Germans stigmatized Turks as uneducated, and the main reason is the first- and second-generation Turkish immigrants who live in Germany as workers. G05 noted:

Due to the first- and second-generation immigrants, Turks' reputation is not good here, even though there are some successful Turkish immigrants. All Turks are not as they are perceived to be. I am Turkish, but I am certainly not an uneducated migrant worker, as some of them have labelled me, but I still need to put more effort into building relations, because of existing prejudgments. Since I come from there, I try to introduce the modern side of Turkey. It is crucial to break down their biases by representing Turkey well.

Third, participants typically stated that Germans stigmatized Turks as conservative. According to the participants, there are two reasons for this stigma: The existing conservative Muslim-Turks living in Germany and some Germans do not differentiate Turkish culture from Arabic culture, because of their having the same religious background. G08 reported:

While chatting with someone, he learned that I am Turkish. Then, his face changed, and he ask me some strange questions, such as 'Do you wear a burka in Turkey? How many wives does your father have? ... ' I tried to answer that not every Turk are Muslin or wears a scarf, and also Islam and Arab culture are different things, but he did not believe me.

In addition, although emphasizing that they did not experience any discriminative attitude on-campus, participants typically mentioned that, due to being a foreigner or a Turk, they were exposed to discrimination off-campus, which was a challenge in their life in Germany. G07 reported, "Once, an old guy asked me something and I could not answer. He yelled at me in German, like, 'if you cannot speak German do not come here, do not live here!' This humiliation made me feel horrible." Also, G15 stated:

I went to the dentist. She said that I needed a tooth filling. Instead of starting treatment, she made an appointment for a future date. When I went back for the appointment, she told me to get my treatment in Turkey.

Besides, participants typically indicated having academic stress due to the challenging education system that affected their life negatively. For example, G03 explained, "The German education system is very challenging. According to the

rules, students who fail the same exam three times are expelled from the school. So, I have to study every day. Otherwise, I cannot pass.” Further, a variant category emerged from the data in this domain. Participants explained that sometimes they felt homesick, especially in difficult times such as exam periods. G06 noted, “Occasionally, I am homesick. It is like a wave that comes and goes. I feel it when I am stressed, especially in the exam term, and have a problem.” However, most of the participants specified that they did not feel homesick due to the geographical proximity between Germany and Turkey because they could easily go to Turkey whenever they wanted.

Last, participants typically expressed that they perceived large differences between Turkish and German cultures that cause challenges in interpersonal relationships with locals and make their adaptation harder. Accordingly, participants considered Germans as distant in relationships, superficial, and polite, as a result of German culture. For example, G04 noted, “Germans are cold but nice. You need to pay attention to their personal space and avoid touching them, and do not talk about your private lives. Compared to Turks, they prefer such superficial relationships that are far from sincere” Also, G12 reported, “We are too different from Germans. They are so individualistic, and hospitality is completely different. For example, they do not offer any food or drink when you visit them.”

The Contributing Factors in the Adaptation Process Domain

Participants mentioned the coping strategies and resources they applied in dealing with problems relating to their adaptation process in Germany. The first category under this domain is coping strategies as representative of participants’ responses and the strategies they used in managing difficulties, as well as enhancing intercultural interactions and reducing the stress associated with such contact. Four subcategories stemmed from this category: First, participants typically defined acceptance as a “means of coping” strategy. They respected and accepted the German culture and values. Acceptance facilitated their cultural learning and, consequently, their adaptation. G09 noted, “I accept that Germany is my home for as long as I stay here and that makes everything easier. After accepting, I improved my language and got involved with the locals.” Also, G12 said, “I kept pace with the Germans and their culture. I accept people as they are. The world does not just consist of Turks. This makes everything easier.” Second, participants generally considered negative experiences to be an exception, avoided generalizing as a coping strategy, and focused on the academic setting instead. As G01 reported:

Some individual things can happen off-campus such as at the supermarket. They see your name on the credit card and they do not behave very nicely. I cannot generalize because I never experienced such things in an academic setting and it is not always the case, but it does happen.

Third, participants typically stated that they tried to overcome problems by dealing with stressors directly. As G10 explained,

At first, I lived in a suburb. This part of the city was not good and was far from the campus. It was a disappointment for me. So, I said, 'whenever you turn from loss, there is gain' and I relocated.

Further, all interviewees either participated in a German language school or attended extracurricular German language classes in order to quickly solve the language barrier problem. Namely, most of the participants indicated that when they identified the source of their problems, they took action directly without any delay to solve them. Fourth, the participants typically noted that they sought social support from friends and family to cope with their adaptation problems in Germany. G09 reported, "I call my parents when I miss home or feel lonely."

The second category under this domain is the support system. It describes relations with others and opportunities for reducing stress and for facilitating the adaptation process of participants on- and off-campus. In this context, three subcategories were examined separately:

First, results showed that the participants generally had strong family bonds and their family supported them financially and emotionally in the adaptation process. G11 stated, "Apart from my financial needs, my family also supports me emotionally. They understand me best. Sometimes just hearing their voices is enough to improve my mood." Second, the participants mentioned that they had a supportive heterogeneous peer network, including co-nationals, other internationals, and locals. Depending on the nature of the stress, they get support from different groups to cope with different types of challenges they face during their adaptation process. Also, most of them indicated that their best friend was Turkish. In the words of G13:

I have a relationship with everyone but sharing emotional issues with my best Turkish friend is easier due to the common culture and language. Local friends, however, know everything and support me in both academic and daily life, especially in improving my German language proficiency. Therefore, I try to chat with them as much as possible. Also, as we face similar challenges in Germany, we are in strong solidarity with other internationals and, through them, I learn about different cultures.

Third, the results showed that participants generally considered themselves as having a supportive school structure that contributed to their adaptation and motivated participants' integration by means of a friendly atmosphere and social facilities. For example, G08 explained, "I can say that the staffs at university are well-organized. They are very sensitive and feel an obligation to help international students in their integration. In the classroom, professors are helpful and motivate you to be interactive." Also, participants described supportive school facilities that increased interaction among students during the adaptation process. G14 noted:

Library is real life here. Sometimes, I only go to the library to socialize and avoid feeling alone. Also, there is a lunch culture here. We always have lunch, all of us together. Besides, the school organizes free events, and everyone is invited.

Attitudes toward the Counseling Services Domain

This domain defines the participants' perceptions and attitudes toward getting professional counseling support or use of mental health services to cope with stress and problems in the adaptation process. A variant category showed that half of the participants were not completely open to the counseling services for getting psychological support to deal with stressors. For example, G07 indicated, "When I need it, my family or friends, who know and understand me best, immediately support me. The counselor is only a last resort." Another variant category stemming from this domain indicated that participants had inaccurate information about using professional counseling services for psychological support associated with adaptation. For example, G04 reported, "I have not experienced a problem serious enough to go to the counselor." In addition, the participants typically did not have enough information about school counseling services. G08 noted, "I remember when I started university, I received an email about the counseling service. But I cannot remember anything about it." Also, G15 stated, "I have no idea about it. Maybe there is not a counseling service at the university. Because I have not heard about one from others, either." Overall, the results showed that counseling services or any other mental health intervention services were not a part of the adaptation process of the TIS who participated in this study. In addition, participants did not have any awareness about the possible consequences of adaptation challenges.

DISCUSSION

The study aimed at investigating the adaptation experiences of TIS sojourners in Germany. It also contributed to adaptation literature as it focused on defining themes related to TIS, a particular nationality-cultural group that has not been studied in the context of Germany. According to the study's findings, various issues affected the adaptation of TIS, including their perceptions of Germany, the unique challenges they faced, the contributing factors to the adaptation process (social support networks, strategies for coping with adaptation problems), and the attitudes of TIS toward counseling services in the process.

The findings of this study showed that TIS' perceptions of German universities differ from their perceptions of Germany itself. According to Ward and Geeraert (2016), different contexts, including institutional and societal, affect the adaptation process, and a supportive school environment can be important and effective in motivating students to have a positive attitude toward the host country. The participants' motives for adaptation focused foremost on the academic context, depending on their sojourner status and migration goals. They defined Germany as a country that contributes to their self-development with its

multicultural structure, and its attitudes to safety and freedom. The participants also believed that Germany offers them not only free and high-quality education but also high-level job opportunities. These positive perceptions increased TIS' motivation for their stay in Germany (e.g., Suoglu, 2012). Similarly, Burkholder (2014) mentioned that a prestigious American degree and possible job opportunities are essential motivational factors for TIS in the United States.

In addition, the challenges experienced by TIS in Germany during the adaptation process are in line with previous studies on the adaptation difficulties of Turkish international students in the United States (e.g., Burkholder, 2014; Duru & Poyrazli, 2011; Kilinc & Granello, 2003) as well as other international student groups in Germany (e.g., Yu & Wang, 2011). In this study, however, findings showed that TIS were exposed to many negative stereotypes owing to being Turkish, Muslim, and foreigner; accordingly, they reported themselves as being 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. Consequently, they make more effort when dealing with German friends and try to break their prejudices. Also, TIS consider themselves as having a higher status than immigrants; the study's findings suggest that they believe that being an international student (sojourner) is a sign, in itself, that they are well educated and have a financially stable background.

Moreover, TIS in Germany experienced discrimination, but only off-campus. This finding supports the results of a study conducted by Hanassab (2006), who reported that international students in the United States were exposed to discrimination more frequently off-campus, spanning from covert interactions to overt acts. This kind of experience demotivates international students from establishing friendships with locals (Mori, 2000). Similarly, Yu and Wang (2011) stated that Chinese international students were rejected by the Germans due to prejudice and discrimination, causing them to separate from the locals. This study, however, shows that 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. According to our findings, TIS perceived that the border between themselves and their German peers was not impermeable (e.g., Tajfel, 1978). Through the positive campus atmosphere and sojourn motivation, TIS continued to maintain and leverage relationships with locals to develop their language and intercultural communication skills as well as to provide practical information. However, acculturative stressors such as prejudice, discrimination, and academic challenges, especially in exam terms, caused TIS to continue to experience

adaptation problems such as homesickness. Similarly, Duru and Poyrazli (2011) and Kilinc and Granello (2003) mentioned that perceived discrimination brings about additional adjustment challenges for TIS in the United States.

The findings of this study indicated that TIS in Germany used several coping strategies to deal with the challenges and also to facilitate their adaptation process. Ward et al. (2001) claimed that problem-focused coping during adaptation is the best strategy for international students, and TIS in Germany preferred coping directly with their challenges and stressors such as by learning the German language. The effort toward language learning is a key factor that increases their motivation to communicate with locals in the adaptation process (e.g., Burkholder, 2014; Duru & Poyrazli, 2011). In addition, Nakamura and Orth (2005) stated that active acceptance was an adaptive response when an individual was challenged by unchanging situations, which is consistent with the results of this study. Also, the purpose of TIS' moving to Germany and their experiences, mostly off-campus, has led students to highlight their international student identity and focus more on the academic context, self-development, and motivation. Thus, they avoided generalizing their negative experiences, which contributed to the reduction of cultural stress, the perception of out-group heterogeneity, and their gaining of a positive perception of Germany.

Besides coping strategies, social support contributed to the reduction of TIS' stress during adaptation to their new environment. Bender et al. (2019) showed that having multiple sources of social support is associated with getting the most positive outcomes from the adaptation. Consistently, participants in this study reported having positive and supportive networks within their family and heterogeneous peer groups, including locals, co-nationals, and other internationals. In line with their academic, social, and practical needs, TIS established multiple sources of social support and they sought help from these sources as and when necessary. However, the main source of emotional support for TIS in Germany is their family members and co-national friends, due to language, familiarity, and cultural background. The literature highlights that family support increases cultural integration and decreases stress (Bertram et al., 2014). The findings of this study support previous results of TIS-related research (e.g., Bektas et al., 2009; Duru & Poyrazli, 2007, 2011), where the importance of co-national support in the adjustment of TIS is mentioned.

In addition, Gloria et al. (2005) noted that students' perceptions of university affect their social integration. For the TIS in this study, university was not only the place where they received their education, but also an interactive environment for socializing. They also stated that the staff as a whole enabled a supportive and organized school system for them, but the results of this study showed that TIS remain unaware of the existence or functioning of the counseling services at their universities. The underutilization of counseling services in the adaptation process of international students has been widely mentioned in the literature (Mori, 2000). Consistently, participants did not seek professional support when addressing their adaptation challenges. Participants had the perception that counseling services were only for serious mental problems (e.g., Smith & Khawaja, 2011). However, those who report a negative attitude toward counseling services, considering them

to be a last resort, are not completely closed to the idea of using them. In addition, the literature highlights that concern about negative stigma is an important reason for international students' underutilization of counseling services (e.g., Mori, 2000). Throughout the interviews in this study however, participants did not report any concerns about stigma regarding the use of counseling services. Our findings are in line with previous studies on the utilization of counseling services of Turkish students in Turkey (e.g., Topkaya et al., 2017) and international students, including TIS (e.g., Kilinc & Granello, 2003; Mori, 2000).

IMPLICATIONS

This study reveals several implications about TIS for advisors, administrators, professors, and other employees at German universities; it also highlights the importance of systematic programs for TIS' adaptation. The results of this study suggest that the universities need to develop different strategies for counseling services. Moreover, during and after the pre-term orientation week, workshops and training sessions that introduce German culture may be useful for improving well-being and enabling the behavioral adaptation of TIS.

In addition, universities can consider intercultural competence training for students and university personnel in order to enlighten them on the harmful effects of stereotyping and discrimination. Thus, social boundaries between host and TIS would collapse and the degree of perceived social acceptance of TIS could be enhanced. For example, under the control of counselors, culturally sensitive posters and social clubs that include local students may be helpful to both local and international students in improving cultural sensitivity, the ability to make friends and in increasing interaction between students. Thus, TIS are encouraged to become actively involved in their adaptation. Also, counselors may contribute to the development and strengthening of TIS' ability to cope with stress through participating in group activities. Therefore, psychologists may help TIS find their most effective coping strategy.

Moreover, counselors ought to take into account TIS' cultural background when providing professional services, and they must remember that personal and cultural limitations may prevent many TIS from seeking counseling services to address their extreme experiences (e.g., discrimination). Thus, counselors play a vital role in helping TIS recognize their stress levels and in recognizing when mental health intervention is needed. Pedersen (1991) emphasized that counselors must go beyond their personal background and biases in a multicultural environment to better serve their international clients. They should be sensitive and positive toward TIS, as their well-being depends on it. Although TIS have useful support networks and some beneficial coping strategies to overcome harmful discrimination and stigma, they still feel threatened and have negative emotions and perceptions about themselves, and about in-group/out-group distinctions. Besides, the future of the currently positive atmosphere on German campuses is uncertain, and TIS could experience discriminatory threats at any time. When these risks are taken into consideration, counselors should attempt to

reach international students by using various channels and keep them informed about the available therapeutic, preventive, and guidance services.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This study has three limitations to be considered due to its context and the nature of the methodology chosen. First, the findings of the study are limited to the experiences of the 15 participants. Second, because there was no earlier study regarding the adaptation of TIS in Germany, the interpretations of the results of this study may not be integrated with the relevant literature to provide convergence or divergence. Lastly, although “Skype” interviews helped with increasing participant honesty, it is possible that some nonverbal behaviors of the participants were missed. Nevertheless, this study provided insights about the adaptation process of TIS. Since this was the first study to investigate the adaptation experiences of TIS in Germany by using qualitative analyses, further studies are needed to explore the phenomenon by using different lenses and to compare and contrast the findings of this study.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors have reported no potential conflict of interest.

Lan Anh Nguyen Luu was supported by a grant from the Hungarian National Research, Development and Innovation Office, NKFIH, Budapest, Hungary (K-120433).

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