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International Students' Adjustment Challenges

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ABSTRACT

*In recent decades, Turkey has become a popular destination for international students, prompting a need to better understand their experiences and provide them with a high-quality education. The book *International Students' Adjustment Challenges* draws from extensive research and a thorough literature review to meet this demand. It addresses challenges that international students encounter in academic, sociocultural, and personal dimensions, discusses various coping strategies to deal with these challenges, and emphasizes the importance of seeking professional psychological help when needed. Furthermore, the book provides valuable insights for international student offices on how to improve their facilities and their support system for international students.*



Over the past two decades, Turkey has seen a significant increase in its number of international students despite previously being considered a sending country. According to the Council of Higher Education (CoHE) report, the total number of international students was 48,183 in 2013-2014. However, in 2020-2021, the number reached 224,048, marking the seventh in the world (CoHE, 2021; UNESCO, 2023). This drastic change in the number of international students has highlighted the necessity to examine these students' experiences. Current literature in international education primarily focuses on Western, English-speaking countries. There needs to be more research on the experiences of international students in non-Western, non-English speaking countries, such as Turkey. Dr. Nazir's book fills this gap. As an international

student himself, he completed his doctoral degree in counseling psychology in Turkey and wrote this book focusing on international students who enrolled in Turkish universities.

The book is structured into nine chapters. Chapter 1 presents the historical context of international education in the world and defines who can be called an international student. Also, the author explains Turkey's position in international education in this chapter explicitly because the study is based on data collected in Turkey. This chapter highlights the importance of understanding cultural interactions between the host country and international students.

In Chapter 2, the author provides the theoretical framework for the rest of the book by conducting a comprehensive literature review. The chapter begins with a definition of adjustment, as well as various concepts, terms, and theories related to the adjustment processes and the underlying dynamics of pursuing higher education abroad. For instance, the author uses Jean Piaget's Theory of Development to explain the adaptation process. To explain the international student's adjustment stages in the new culture, the author presents the term "cultural shock" and the "U-Curve Model" by Oberg (1960). Berry's (1992) "Model of Acculturation" is presented to provide an understanding of the possible attitudes of international students toward the host country's culture. Moreover, the chapter employs MacMahon's (1992) "Push and Pull Model" to explain the various factors that influence students' decisions to study abroad. Overall, this chapter reviews important theories in simple and coherent language, which makes the book accessible to audiences from diverse backgrounds.

In Chapter 3, the author describes the mixed-method research design used for the study. The quantitative part was conducted as a cross-sectional study with 370 international students from various cities in Turkey who came only for academic purposes. They were asked to fill out the demographic form and the International Students Adjustment Scale (ISAS). The purpose was to assess to what extent the adjustment levels were related to academic, socio-cultural, and personal dimensions of adjustment. Nazir found out that these dimensions have a significant influence on international students' overall adjustment. In the qualitative part of the research, group and one-on-one interviews were conducted with international students aged between 18 and 35 in Turkey to gain a deeper understanding of students' experiences in the above-mentioned dimensions. Then, thematic analyses were used to address the most challenging areas mentioned by students in each dimension.

Chapter 4 of the book delves deeper into the author's research findings. In this chapter, it is discussed that there is a likelihood of a mismatch between students' pre-departure expectations and their actual experiences during the first few days of their arrival. Based on the literature review and interviews, Dr. Nazir emphasizes the importance of having realistic expectations. It's essential to recognize that having overly high expectations when studying abroad can result in disappointment and therefore, negatively affect international students' mental

health. This chapter brings attention to this potential issue as a cautionary note for those who aspire to study abroad.

The subsequent three chapters are dedicated to explaining specifically how academic, sociocultural, and personal dimensions shape the overall adjustment. Each chapter is divided into multiple subsections based on the results of the thematic analysis, with each subsection focusing on one theme. For instance, the academic adjustment chapter addresses how academic adjustment is affected by different classroom norms, cultural differences in the interaction with instructors, academic reading and writing assignments, and networks. In the sociocultural adjustment chapter, the author draws attention to the advantages and drawbacks of the concentration of international students in “mini cultures.” The author defines “mini culture” as the primary cultural, religious, ethnic, and linguistic enclaves that international students engage in. The study found that while creating a mini-culture can initially help international students by providing social support and quick solutions to their problems and, in the long run, avoiding venturing out of this mini-culture can prevent them from adjusting to the host country. In these chapters, the author also provides day-to-day examples related to different dimensions of adjustment, which allows the reader to gain a better understanding of the information presented.

Chapter 8 offers valuable insights on approaching adjustment challenges from a constructivist perspective as well as coping strategies. In line with the literature (Jackson et al., 2013), Dr. Nazir categorized coping mechanisms into two types - adaptive and maladaptive. The adaptive strategies are helpful in facilitating the adjustment process. For example, students can manage homesickness and its potential negative impact on their academic, social, and personal lives in the host country by staying connected with their family and friends back home. Students can also employ other coping mechanisms such as asking for help, adopting a problem-solver attitude, exploring new hobbies, exercising, meditating, practicing religion, etc. However, the author also draws attention to the fact that an over-reliance on adaptive coping mechanisms can be counterproductive. For instance, depending solely on family and old friends for support, adopting the attitude of deliberate ignorance, or engaging in substance use can hinder the adjustment process because students are not building new social interactions or seeking professional help that can benefit them in the long run. The author emphasizes the significance of maintaining a balance in their use of coping mechanisms when adapting to a new country.

The last chapter explains how orientation programs work and the importance of a support system. It sheds light on the crucial role that international students play in the country, highlighting the urgency of addressing this matter with the seriousness it deserves. It particularly emphasizes the significance of providing high-quality orientation programs to enable students to transition into their new environment seamlessly, as well as establishing an enduring support system that international students can rely on throughout their journey within the host country.

There is no doubt that the author's profession as a counseling psychologist shaped the book's ultimate aim, which is to help international students maintain their psychological well-being. From this point of view, *International Students' Adjustment Challenges* is a valuable resource and unique guideline for current and prospective international students. The use of empathetic language and real-life experiences of international students is highly impactful. For student readers, this thoughtful approach reminds them that they are not alone in their journey and that seeking help is a natural and necessary part of the process. Institutional and administrative readers, on the other hand, can learn about the experiences of students and take appropriate measures to enhance to better support their international students.

In general, Dr. Nazir's book fills a gap in the literature by focusing on the experiences of international students in a non-English speaking country, and it also has a student-focused approach rather than a top-down academic perspective. However, it should be noted that the book's findings have some limitations, such as its disproportionate high percentage of student participants from the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent. Despite this limitation, the book offers valuable insights for international student offices and departments to enhance their facilities and support for international students, as well as provides guidance to international students on how to manage the challenges they may encounter throughout their studies.

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