

**T.C.
YILDIZ TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES M.A. PROGRAMME**

M.A. THESIS

**INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND
ADAPTATION OF SYRIAN UNIVERSITY
STUDENTS: A STUDY AT A FOUNDATION
UNIVERSITY IN ISTANBUL**

**RUKİYE UÇAR
14735008**

**THESIS SUPERVISOR
ASSOC. PROF. DR. KEREM KARAOSMANOĞLU**

**ISTANBUL
2019**

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ÖZ

SURİYELİ ÜNİVERSİTE ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN KÜLTÜRLERARASI İLETİŞİM VE ADAPTASYONU: İSTANBUL'DA BİR VAKIF ÜNİVERSİTESİ'NDE GERÇEKLEŞEN BİR ÇALIŞMA

Rukiye Uçar
Haziran, 2019

Suriye'de 2011 yılında başlayan iç karışıklık hala devam etmekte ve bu durum yakın zamanda çözüme ulaşacak gibi görünmemektedir. Savaşın başından bu yana Suriye'yi esir almış olan kaos ortamı milyonlarca Suriyeliyi yerinden etmiştir. Suriyeli sığınmacı sayısının en fazla olduğu ülke olarak ve benimsediği açık kapı politikası ile Türkiye'nin bu iç karışıklıktan, Suriye'den sonra en çok etkilenen ülke olduğunu söylemek yanlış olmayacaktır. Nitekim 2019 yılı itibarıyla Türkiye'deki Suriyeli mülteci sayısı 3.630.767'ye ulaşmıştır (UNHCR, 2019).

Suriyeli üniversiteli öğrenciler, Türkiye'ye sığınan toplam Suriyeli sayısının dikkate değer bir kısmını oluşturmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı maruz kaldıkları zorunlu göçün Türkiye'deki Suriyeli üniversite öğrencilerinin eğitim ve adaptasyonu üzerindeki etkilerini kültürlerarası adaptasyon bağlamında incelemektir. Var olan literatüre bakıldığında, eğitim amaçlı yapılan gönüllü göçler ve bu sebeple farklı bir ülkeye giden öğrencilerin adaptasyon süreci ile ilgili çalışmalar ön plana çıkmaktadır. Suriyeli öğrenciler gibi yerinden edilen öğrencilerin durumuna bakıldığında ise, araştırmalar mevcut olmakla birlikte daha fazla bilgiye ihtiyaç duyulduğu söylenebilir. Böylece söz konusu öğrencilerin durumu daha iyi anlaşılabilir, ihtiyaçları daha iyi karşılanabilir ve Türkiye'de akademik ve sosyal ortamlara uyum süreçlerinde bu öğrencilere gerekli yardım ve yönlendirme daha iyi bir şekilde sağlanabilir. Bu doğrultuda, bu çalışmada, nitel araştırma yöntemi kullanılmıştır ve İstanbul'da bir vakıf üniversitesinde okuyan on beş Suriyeli öğrenci ile derinlemesine mülakat ve bir hedef grup mülakatı gerçekleştirilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Zorunlu Göç, Üniversite Eğitimi, Türkiye'deki Suriyeli Üniversite Öğrencileri, Kültürlerarası İletişim ve Uyum.

ABSTRACT

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION AND ADAPTATION OF SYRIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: A STUDY AT A FOUNDATION UNIVERSITY IN ISTANBUL

**Rukiye Uçar
June 2019**

The Syrian Civil War has been going on since 2011, and the violent conflicts do not seem to be resolved soon. There has been utter chaos prevailing in the region since the onset of the war, displacing millions of Syrians out of their war-wrecked countries to safer locations. Turkey, as a neighboring country, has received the highest number of Syrian refugees with its open door policy, and therefore it would not be wrong to state that, after Syria, it is the country most affected by the war. As of 2019, the number of registered Syrian refugees in Turkey has reached 3.630.767 (UNHCR, 2019).

This study aims to analyze the impact of forced migration on the education and adaptation of Syrian university students, who comprise a significant portion of Syrians seeking refuge in Turkey. Considering the existing literature, it would be safe to say that it mainly focuses on voluntary migrations for educational purposes and the adaptation problems experienced by these voluntary migrants in the host environment. When it comes to the situation of the displaced students, research does exist, but is inadequate requiring further exploration so that the situation of the students in question can be better understood, their needs can be met and they can be provided with the necessary help and guidance throughout their adaptation process. To this end, a qualitative research method has been used in the current study, and fifteen extensive individual interviews and one focus group interview have been conducted with Syrian students studying at a foundation university in Istanbul.

Key Words: Forced Migration, University Education, Syrian University Students in Turkey, Intercultural Communication and Adaptation

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I would like to dedicate this work to my late father, Ahmet Uçar, to whom I owe a lot. He was a great father who always put his children and their education first.

Istanbul; June, 2019

Rukiye Uçar

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ABBREVIATIONS

UNESCO	: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
CoHE	: Council of Higher Education
YÖK	: Council of Higher Education
SSPC	: Student Selection and Placement Center
OSYM	: Student Selection and Placement Center
YKS	: Examination for Higher Education Institutions
YÖS	: International Student Examination
MEB	: Ministry of National Education
TÖMER	: Turkish and Foreign Languages Research and Application Center
NGO	: Non-Governmental Organization

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

The Syrian civil war, which started in 2011, has displaced millions of Syrians. Escaping from the violence and escalating tensions in their countries, Syrians have had to seek refuge in safer locations within and outside of their countries. As one of the neighboring countries, Turkey has received the highest number of Syrian refugees to date. According to the latest figures, the number of Syrian refugees in Turkey has reached 3.630.767 (UNHCR, 2019), which comprise more than half the Syrians externally displaced. This means that the case of displaced Syrians requires paramount consideration. As an ethical response to the war victims, Turkey, initially, implemented an open door policy and acted leniently towards Syrian entrance to Turkey, and all Syrians, in this regard, were treated as guests (İçduygu & Millet, 2016). Though it should be mentioned that the lenience and viewing Syrians as guests were the proclamations of the government and were not universally followed by the populace. Over time, it turned out that the upheaval in Syria would not come to an end in the foreseeable future, which, consequently, extended the stay of the Syrians in Turkey and led the number of the Syrians outside the camps to rise (İçduygu, 2015).

Among the various challenges faced by the Syrians in Turkey is the educational needs of those outside the camps. Education is a human right, and no individual must be deprived of it. Therefore, Syrian youth's education rights must be preserved by the countries that they are in regardless of their location. This study aims to extensively analyze the cross-cultural adaptation of Syrian university students in Turkey, whose numbers have increased exponentially over the years. Considering the dramatic growth in the number of Syrians seeking shelter in Turkey, this growth is quite conceivable. Today, 20.071 Syrian students have been registered in a higher education institution in Turkey (YÖK

2019). Also, as found by Erdoğan and Erdoğan (2018), the majority of the Syrians in Turkey will not likely return to Syria, which highlights the importance of doing research in this context so that effective ways can be found to address the situation of Syrians' long-term or permanent stay in Turkey.

The aim of this study is to have a better insight into the situation of the Syrian University students in Turkey and to shed light on the issues they encounter in their adaptation process.

1.2. The Organization of the Thesis

The thesis is comprised of eight chapters: Introduction, Cross-cultural Adaptation in Educational Context, The Turkish Background, Methodology, Entry to Turkey and Initial Impressions, Major Challenges, Impact of the Challenges and Conclusion.

The study will first look at the existing literature on international students, which mainly focuses on voluntary migrations for educational purposes and cross-cultural adaptation of international students in this regard. The issues that the international students have to cope with will be discussed under six categories: adaptation and acculturation of international students, multiculturalism and diversity in educational institutions, culture shock, perceived discrimination, language, and international student migration.

Then the Turkish background regarding the Syrians' displacement, Turkish education system and the Syrian university students' cross-cultural adaptation process in Turkey will be expounded on.

The methodology of the study will give information about the research paradigm, the participants of the study and administration of the interviews. For the study, a qualitative research approach has been used, and fifteen in-depth, semi-structured individual interviews and one focus group interview have been conducted. All the participants of the study are Syrian students studying at a foundation university in Istanbul.

Finally, the interview data obtained will be analyzed in three different categories as the entry to Turkey and initial impressions of the Syrian students, major challenges, and the impact of these challenges on Syrian students.

1.3. Limitations of the Study

One main limitation of the study concerns the venue of the interviews. The interviews were conducted on the campus of the university where the students are studying. This was done so for the students to easily access the interview venue, yet it may have affected their answers to the questions related to their experiences about the university.

Furthermore, the university experiences reported in this study are specific to one foundation university and, due to the differences in admission requirements, admission costs, and medium of instruction, may not reflect the experiences of Syrian students studying at a public university or other foundation universities.

Another limitation is related to the language of the interviews. Many of the participants reported their experiences through the use of a second language, English and Turkish to be specific, which may have diminished their ability to provide sufficiently detailed accountings of their experiences. Also, one participant chose to do the interview in Arabic, for which the assistance of a translator was enlisted. For that interview, the researcher had to rely on the accounting provided by the translator, running the potential risk of meaning being lost in translation.

Finally, most of the participants of the study belong to the middle class in Syria considering their backgrounds, and, therefore, the findings may not reflect the experiences of Syrian university students coming from different economic backgrounds.

2. CROSSCULTURAL ADAPTATION IN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

Today, there is a worldwide rise in the number of mobile students crossing borders for educational purposes, and the rise is attributed to the world becoming more and more internationalized and globalized (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016, p. 1821). These international students studying at foreign universities play an important role for the host universities in terms of exchange of cultures, academic reputation and financial benefits (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016, p. 1822; Perry, Lausch, Weatherford, Goeken & Almendares, 2017; Hegarty, 2014, p. 225). To elaborate, they make a great contribution to the diverse atmosphere of their schools and the communities they become a part of (Wu, Garza & Guzman, 2015, p. 1). In some studies, it is argued that, compared to domestic students, most international students are more enthusiastic about their studies and are hardworking, thereby contributing positively to the academic status of their universities (Baklashova and Kazakov, 2016, p. 2). International students are also an economic source for the host countries (Perry et al., 2017, p. 279) with the tuition fees they pay to the institutions they study at and with the money they spend on their living (Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016, p. 1823). Briefly, students studying in a foreign country not only enrich themselves, but also contribute to the country and the institution they study at in various ways.

On the other hand, being aware of all the benefits contributed by the international students does not necessarily enable a smooth process without challenges for the students pursuing education in a foreign country. International students usually experience adjustment problems due to numerous changes they need to adapt themselves to in the new culture (Malaklolunthu & Selan, 2011, p. 834). A different food culture, different living conditions, economic issues, issues related to their academic studies, and language related, cultural and personal issues are some of many difficulties they experience (Wu et al., 2015, p. 2; Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016, p. 1823). When the increasing number of

mobile students are considered, these difficulties, unless overcome, may have unfavorable consequences for the whole world.

In this respect, it becomes of utmost importance to have a deeper insight into the challenging process that international students go through by going into the details of their cross-cultural adaptation. This chapter will review the literature on cross-cultural adaptation of international students and the issues they have to cope with under six different categories: adaptation and acculturation of international students, multiculturalism and diversity in educational institutions, culture shock, perceived discrimination, language, and international student migration.

2.1. Adaptation and Acculturation of International Students

In recent decades, there has been a constant flow of people from one place to another for various reasons including education. In 2015, the total number of international migrants was about 244 million worldwide, which indicated an increase of about 90 million compared to the statistics of 2000 (IOM -International Organization for Migration-, World Migration Report, 2018, p. 13). What's more, according to the UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) statistics from 2016, the number of internationally mobile students alone reached over 4.8 million globally (as cited in Migration Data Portal, 2018). These high figures inevitably bring on the issue of adaptation to the new culture and environment that these people are in. As this tendency of the flow of people from one place to another, especially from one country to another, becomes widespread, understanding how the incoming people and the people of the host country communicate with one another is of high importance today (Lee, 2017, p. 1). At this point, the terms "adaptation" and "acculturation" need to be defined and analyzed for a better understanding of how this communication comes about. According to Berry, acculturation means, "culture change that results from continuous, first-hand contact between two distinct cultural groups", and he defines adaptation as the results of acculturation process and the strategies people use in the same process (as cited in Lee, 2017, p. 3). In this respect, it is possible to say that the terms acculturation and adaptation go hand in hand.

For an insight into how and why this cross-cultural adaptation happens, different theories have been proposed. According to Kim's (2001) "Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory", people inherently tend to make an effort to find a balance in their lives when they find themselves in an environment with adverse conditions. Kim suggests, "To become competent in the host communication system, in turn, requires active participation in the interpersonal and mass communication processes of the local community" (Kim, n. d., Theory Reflections: Cross-Cultural Adaptation Theory, para. 3). In other words, how individuals interact with the members of the host culture and its mass media plays a crucial role in the process of their adaptation. When the individual is focused on adaptation, her identity inevitably undergoes change, as well, and the individual, consequently, becomes more open and tolerant toward differences, as she gains different perspectives with new experiences (Kim, n.d.). Briefly, people face challenges in their new environment, make an effort to deal with the challenges by adapting to the host culture through interaction with the environment, and eventually change, achieving the adaptation process.

An alternative theory about cross-cultural adaptation is by Anderson (1994). Anderson proposes that individuals go through a change as a result of the constant interaction between their self and the surroundings that they are in, especially in transitional periods. In her theory, Anderson suggests 4 stages of adaptation, which are a) the stage of first encounter with the host culture, b) the stage of obstacles, in which challenges caused from the self or the environment emerge, c) the stage of response generation in reaction to the obstacles faced, and d) the stage of overcoming, in which the individual could, in most cases, adapt herself to the new environment. Individuals go through these stages in an adjustment process involving an interaction between feelings, cognitive processes and actions in relation to these. This acculturation process results in various changes, some of which include behavioral and psychological changes in the individual level, and economic, cultural, biological, physical, political and social changes at the group level (Berry, 1992, Acculturation, para. 2 and 3). Both theories indicate the importance of interaction between the individual and her environment in the process of a successful adaptation, which highlights the importance of understanding how international students and members of the host culture reciprocally perceive this interaction.

International students comprise a huge part of the people who have to go through an acculturative and adaptive process worldwide. An increasingly high number of students go abroad every year to get education in a foreign educational institution. Like immigrants, international students also have to adapt themselves to an educational system and cultural norms that they may be unfamiliar with (Poyrazli, Thukral & Duru, 2010, p. 25). Looking at the existing literature, it can be suggested that international students have strong and highly prized qualities. Unruh (2015), after having in-depth interviews with international students and university faculty at a public university in the U.S., as part of her qualitative study, concluded,

Faculty see these students as motivated, committed, focused, goal-oriented, and determined to succeed. They are smart and tend to have stronger science and math skills than domestic students. They have a strong work ethic and are conscientious and respectful. They are culturally competent, flexible, and adaptable... (p. 9)

Despite having these positive attributes, the acculturative and adaptive process that international students go through may, as stated above, be challenging and hard to tackle. Pedersen suggests that such students may suffer from acculturative stress due to the fact that they may lack a supportive social environment, have issues regarding communication and feel homesick in the initial stages of their stay in the host country (as cited in Poyrazli et al., 2010, p. 25). Further, Kim and Kim (2016) conducted a research to get an insight into Asian students' adaptation to American culture. They used a questionnaire survey and then did in-depth interviews with Asian and European students (2016, p. 68), and found that a relatively easier adaptation depends on the similarity between the students' cultural background and the culture of the host society, and Asian students, therefore, face more adaptive challenges than their European counterparts in the United States (2016, p. 60). They, further, found that the international students psychologically feel better when they are competent in the language of the host country, are familiar with the cultural norms and interact with the people of the host country (2016, p.76). Accordingly, in the case that the host country's language is English and the international students' level of English is low, the international students tend to suffer academically, socially and mentally (Sherry, Thomas & Chui, 2010). Likewise, in an earlier study carried out in an American university by Poyrazli et al. (2010), it was found that, compared to European

students, African, Asian/Pacific Islander, Middle Eastern and Latino students respectively experienced higher levels of stress related to the process of acculturation. The researchers attributed this stress to the level of exposure to racist attitudes and behaviours these students face due to “racial” and “ethnic” differences. They also suggested in American and European cultures, individualism is valued more than collectivism, which makes it difficult for the international students belonging to African, Asian, and Middle Eastern cultures to adapt to American culture, as such a difference may lead to stress and a weak mental health (p. 30, 31; Perry et al., 2017, p. 280). Further, Baier (2005, p. 97) and Lee (2010) suggest that European students feel more satisfied and less alienated than the other international students do in U.S culture. In a broader sense, if the cultural differences are bigger, adaptation becomes a challenge for the international students. When it comes to the studies carried out outside of the U.S., it would be safe to state that the findings are similar. Alemu and Cordier (2017), for instance, have found out that East Asian students adapt more easily to the South Korean culture and expressed greater satisfaction than the students coming from a culture that is less similar to the South Korean culture. As for the current study, cultural aspects may also play a major role in the adaptation of Syrian students depending on how familiar they feel the host culture is to their own, which will be mentioned and elaborated on in a later chapter.

2.2. Culture Shock

Every individual is a unique cultural being. They are surrounded by specific cultural constituents right after their birth, which enables them to perceive the world in certain ways and correspondingly to develop a perspective in their meaning making process. Culture, in Hofstede’s terms, is “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (2001, p. 9). Thus, cultural values can be understood from the behaviours of people sharing the same collective programming of the mind. However, when people, in this case the international students, encounter different cultural elements, understandings and values in a different country and a different social and cultural setting, it is not surprising that they will react to it in one way or another. This encounter may lead to culture shock. Oberg (1954), who first came up with a model of culture shock, stated,

Culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse. These signs or cues include the thousand and one ways in which we orient ourselves to the situations of daily life: when to shake hands and what to say when we meet people, when and how to give tips, how to give orders to servants, how to make purchases, when to accept and when to refuse invitations, when to take statements seriously and when not. Now these cues, which may be words, gestures, facial expressions, customs, or norms, are acquired by all of us in the course of growing up and are as much a part of our culture as the language we speak or the beliefs we accept. All of us depend for our peace of mind and our efficiency on hundreds of these cues, most of which we do not carry on the level of conscious awareness.

Now when an individual enters a strange culture, all or most of these familiar cues are removed. He or she is like a fish out of water. No matter how broad-minded or full of good will you may be, a series of props have been knocked from under you, followed by a feeling of frustration and anxiety (p. 1).

Irwin (2007) agrees with how Oberg explains culture shock, and defines it as a loss of meaning that stems from being unable to share symbols of communication and meaning making (p. 8). Moreover, Oberg (1960) suggests four stages of culture shock, which implies a gradual adjustment to the host culture,

1. The honeymoon stage, when people feel excited about their encounter with the new culture;
2. The crisis stage, when people start developing a negative attitude and stereotypes about the host culture;
3. The stage of development of a positive attitude, when they start to become accustomed to the new culture and react to the differences with a more positive attitude; and
4. The stage of adjustment, when they start to accept the new culture as it is, as they understand they cannot change it, and eventually come to terms with it (p. 177-182).

Although it is doubtful whether each and every single one goes through the same stages of culture shock, international students are surely among the mobile people who experience culture shock the most, as stated above. Students are faced with various challenges when they start a university in a different country whose culture is blindingly different from the culture they belong to (Thomson, Rosenthal & Russell, 2007, p. 3, 6), and one consequence of this situation is homesickness. Homesickness is defined by Tilburg, Vingerhoets and Heck (1996, p. 899) as “the commonly experienced state of distress among those who have left their house and home and find themselves in a new

and unfamiliar environment.” To discuss homesickness further, they mention that those who are homesick miss their home intensively, are depressed and suffer from physical health problems. Homesickness is not necessarily regarded as a normal reaction in all cultures. Matt (2011, p. 4) states that the modern attitude toward homesickness in American culture is in line with the belief that moving from one place to another is a natural part of life that is beyond question, and so those who are homesick are thought to have maturity and adjustment issues.

It goes without saying that homesickness is a common problem faced by international students, which may lead to feelings of despair and even, in some cases, harm the students both physically and psychologically (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007). Similarly, in an Australian study conducted through a survey questionnaire, it was found that international students had a strong feeling of distress and homesickness, followed by a lack of a sense of belonging at the university, both of which were presented as expected results of the study (Thomson et al., 2007, p. 6, 7). It was also reported that only a small number of international students stated that they suffered from discrimination, prejudice, and a feeling of insecurity (p. 6). That is, these were not the issues most of the students participating in the study had to deal with, a result also confirmed by other studies (Perry et al., 2017, p. 288). This is in contradiction to numerous American studies reporting that these issues are suffered by an overwhelming majority of international students (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007).

Loneliness is another issue international students are exposed to. Through the lens of social needs theory, Weiss explains loneliness as a reaction to a social shortfall leading to a longing for the lacking relationship (as cited in Terrell-Deutsch, 1999, p. 11). People have social needs and unless these needs are met through social relationships, they will end up feeling lonely (p. 12). Weiss suggests two types of loneliness: social loneliness, defined as a feeling of exclusion from a group sharing common interests, and emotional loneliness, in which people perceive that they lack a truly close relationship that they need to feel valued (as cited in Terrell-Deutsch, 1999, p. 12). According to the cognitive processes theory, on the other hand, loneliness is not a result of unfulfilled social needs that are inherent in people, but it is about being dissatisfied with interpersonal

relationships perceived by them (Peplau, Miceli & Morasch, 1982, as cited in Terrell-Deutsch, 1999, p. 13). To put it another way, people feel lonely when there is no correspondence between what they hope to encounter and what they actually end up with (Terrell-Deutsch, 1999, p. 13). This is an explanation of loneliness from the “insider’s perspective, focusing on how the lonely person perceives and evaluates her or his social life, not on how outside observers might assess it.” (Peplau et al., 1982, as quoted in Terrell-Deutsch, 1999, p. 13).

Studies carried out in the U.S. have found that international students, compared to their American counterparts, suffered from a feeling of loneliness more (Lehto, Cai, Fu & Chen, 2014; Zhou & Cole, 2017). The reason why international students experience this feeling is not only due to being away from the social networks students have been used to, but also because students are away from their usual cultural and linguistic environments, which indicates the significance of both academic and social support provided by the universities for these international students’ successful adaptation to their new environments (as cited in Sherry et al., 2010, p. 34). What’s more, they tend to experience this feeling at the first stages of their adaptation process, which is, therefore, regarded as the hardest period for them (Sherry et al., 2010, p. 38).

Apart from homesickness and loneliness, international students could experience hardship about finding accommodation, have financial issues but limited job options, and also have difficulty finding information when needed (such as how to do research at the library) (Womujuni, 2007), which may lead to feelings of isolation. In brief, several studies, as mentioned, have reported that most international students, for various reasons, experience culture shock.

2.3. Perceived Discrimination

Discrimination can be defined as treating a person or a group that has been perceived as different in an unfavorable manner. Where people originate from, their ways of living, “race”, ethnicity, and many other aspects of human life cause people to act in a hostile manner towards others whom they perceive as different and not one of them. When international students’ ways of living, their social backgrounds, religious beliefs,

languages and so on are different from those of domestic students, this may lead to discrimination. According to Berry, the perception of discriminatory treatment plays an important part in the process of adaptation of young people to a new culture (as cited in Berry and Sabatier, 2010, p. 194). In the case of a perceived discrimination, they become less willing, both psychologically and socially, to adapt themselves to the new culture (as cited in Berry and Sabatier, 2010, pg.194). Correspondingly, it is more likely for those having positive experiences and building strong relationships in the host culture to come back to the country again and recommend visiting it to other people (Jamaludin, Sam, Sandal & Adam, 2016, p. 944). Thus, it can be inferred that a perception of being exposed to discrimination in the host culture may lead international students to take a negative stance against the host country. Jamaludin et al. (2016) states,

...experienced discrimination leads to lower orientation to mainstream culture, which (again) would negatively influence destination loyalty intention. This research recommends institutions to consider ways to counter problems undermining the international experience. Members of the education community should be aware of this issue and their responsibility in creating healthy atmospheres that foster cross-national acceptance and learning. Furthermore, international students should be made aware of the intercultural issues they are likely to encounter. They must be informed or advised about avenues of support should they encounter unfairness or threatening situations (p. 944).

It is suggested by the findings of the study that everyone involved be prepared to tackle issues regarding discrimination so that any negative experience can be evaded (Jamaludin et al., 2016).

It has been found in another study conducted in the USA that international students perceive discrimination more compared to American students for several reasons, among which are having a noticeable accent while speaking English, coming from a “racial” or “ethnic” minority group, and just simply not being an American (Poyrazlı & Lopez, 2007, p. 272). When international students are exposed to higher levels of discrimination, this is reported to lead them to have acculturation and adaptation problems and to suffer from mental problems, such as a low self-esteem (Poyrazlı & Lopez, 2007, p. 272). Moreover, the longer international students stay in the host culture, the higher the rate of their perceived discrimination is, which can be explained with the theory of culture shock

(Poyrazlı & Lopez, 2007; Pedersen, 1995). According to the theory of culture shock, people start questioning the aspects of the host culture when the honeymoon stage, when they feel excited about their new encounter, is over (Oberg, 1960; Poyrazlı & Lopez, 2007), which is suggested as one reason international students feel more discriminated against when they stay in the host culture longer (Poyrazlı & Lopez, 2007, p. 275). Wadsworth, Hecht, & Jung (2008) note that when international students feel discrimination, this lowers their level of satisfaction in their classroom interactions, as communication and expression toward the members of the target culture becomes a more difficult experience. This information is confirmed by Hanassab (2006), who found, through a questionnaire on diversity and perceived discrimination conducted at UCLA, that some discriminatory treatment is experienced by international students regarding their interaction with faculty members, other students at the university, and community members, but they experienced discrimination more in the host community than in the university premises, and compared to other international students, Middle Eastern and African students feel more discriminated against. That is, the more culturally distant the international students are from the host culture, the more they feel or are discriminated against.

2.4. Language

Undoubtedly, language plays a major role in communication and interaction among people. Inadequate language skills may make adaptation and adjustment of international students to the new environment more challenging, particularly when their mother language is completely different from the language of the host country. Language is, therefore, cited as one of the major challenges that international students face.

In the case of an English-speaking host country, knowing the English language becomes very significant for international students not only for academic success, but also for a smooth social adaptation process and psychological well-being (Zhou & Cole, 2017; Lehto et al., 2014; Sherry et al., 2010; Andrade, 2006). Students may have difficulty in specific skills and aspects of a language. Poyrazlı (2003) stated that the international students academically suffer in reading and writing skills because of their weak language

proficiency. Furthermore, Wu et al. (2015, p. 5) stated that due to several different aspects of the English language, such as different accents and the pronunciation, the students have to make extra effort to be better at the language so that it will no longer be a barrier for their academic adaptation. On the other hand, when the students are expected to participate in communicative classroom activities in which they need to interact with others using the language communicatively, international students may feel at a disadvantage, particularly those who are not very active learners and have received English education that has focused predominantly on receptive skills like reading (Sawir, 2005). This indicates the importance of a language learning process in which all skills are equally focused on and mastered. Similarly, Sherry et al. (2010, p. 37) administered an online survey to international students at the University of Toledo, and the findings indicated that international students needed more effective ways to overcome their spoken language issues compared to their written language issues, which were reported as being addressed already, and was supported with the students' positive comments on the help they received to improve their academic writing skills in the writing center of their university. As is understood, being adept at both receptive and productive skills of a language is important for the academic adaptation and achievement of international students. Also, in designing language support programs for international students international educational institutions may need to consider the gap between the language education that the international students have received in their countries and the language requirements that they have from them.

Besides school success, social and psychological adaptation of international students are also negatively affected by their insufficient language skills. When international students have difficulty adapting to their new environments, they tend to think about and miss their families and friends more (Poyrazlı & Lopez, 2007, p. 272). Similar findings are also supported by earlier researches. For instance, in a longitudinal study conducted by McCormack (1998), it was found that weak English language skills caused Latino students to feel more discriminated against, and Asian students to be more inclined towards self-segregation. This is not to say that the lack of a common language is the only reason to have social problems in the host country, but it is definitely a contributing factor, if not necessarily the primary one.

2.5. Multiculturalism and Diversity in Educational Institutions

Multiculturalism, in a broad sense, can be defined as a term with regards to people who share the same living space, with “different habits, customs, traditions, languages and/or religions” (Colombo, 2014, p. 1). In a more narrow sense, people in a country may belong to different nations or they may have migrated from different nations, and this situation may significantly affect the politics and identity formation in the country. In either case, the country is regarded as multicultural (McDonald, 1996, p. 294). Regarding the fact that immigration between countries has been on the rise worldwide, and even got about three times higher over a period of more than 50 years between 1960 and 2015 (Lee, 2017, p. 1), it is conceivable that the phenomenon of multiculturalism has also been on the rise, since immigrants bring their cultures and customs along with them to the new culture. Yet, due to various reasons ranging from low socioeconomic status of immigrants to the changing nature of immigration worldwide, it is also believed by many that multiculturalism leads to social deterioration and tensions in the host country (Vertovec, 2010, p. 2). Clearly, there are opposing ideas regarding the promotion of multiculturalism and diversity in societies.

There is no doubt that educational institutions, especially higher education institutions, are the potential places where multiculturalism can be greatly experienced. Today, a high number of universities, both in the west and the east of the world, are accepting international students. By studying abroad, students contribute to the multicultural and diverse texture of the institutions they study at. The experiences that students have in a multicultural learning environment contribute positively not only to their academic success, but also to the self-concept of the students in respect of others, to the kind of activities they participate in, to the way they treat others, and to how they regard their capabilities concerning the people they are and will be working with during and after their higher education (Gurin, 1999, as cited in Umbach, 2003, p. 4). According to Umbach (2003, p. 4), being in a diverse environment in higher education is instrumental in the formation and development of a democratic society, and helps students, even after the higher education ends, to adapt to the world that is becoming more and more multicultural. Similarly, Hanassab (2006) states,

A diverse university campus serves its members by providing them with a window on the world, which requires knowledge of the diverse ways in which important matters are viewed across the world and across time. A diverse campus provides its members with the skills necessary to be productive in a multicultural environment. Students must learn to view things from the perspective of others and to discover mutually beneficial resolutions. International students provide the means of diversifying the campus.

Despite the aforementioned benefits, multiculturalism in education is not such a clear-cut matter, as while experiencing multiculturalism on campus, most students, especially international students, face adaptive challenges due to various reasons.

It is worth noting that most of the research conducted in the field of multiculturalism in education is of western origin and focus on the issue of “racial” diversity in school campuses. For instance, in 1998, the Virginia Tech Center for Survey Research conducted a campus climate for diversity survey in a research university in America (Brown, 2004). According to the results of the survey, white students and white faculty members found the campus climate more favorable, in comparison with their African American counterparts; they believed that the programs run to encourage diversity in the school were adequate, and “...white male faculty were largely unaware of the extent of the racism perceived in the university climate by African-Americans.” (Brown, 2004, p. 23). Brown (2004) states that it is now the goal of most of the higher educational institutions to support a multicultural university atmosphere (p. 24), but the problem lies in the application of this goal. According to the same survey, as reported by Hutchinson and Hyer, black students felt that they were recruited only because the school needed to have a representative number of students belonging to minority groups, not because they and their education were genuinely valued (as cited in Brown, 2012, p. 24). Further, believing in the benefits of a diverse learning environment, Chen (2017) analyzed four related studies to make recommendations for institutional leaders who are devoted to integrating diversity into their campus culture. One of the findings of the study was that minority learners may lose their self-esteem, feel isolated and find it difficult to fit in their new environment. In the case of “racial” minorities, some even cannot complete their studies for these reasons. It was, therefore, emphasized by Chen that institutional leaders should urgently address the problems that the minority students go through to provide them with an environment where they can achieve their goals (p. 21). Similarly, Baumgartner and

Bailey (2008, p. 46) stated that though more and more minority students take their place in higher education institutions, and they are thought to contribute to the diverse and multicultural atmosphere of education, these students, in reality, end up feeling isolated and alienated, for which the writers blame the domination of white and male individuals and that of the norms of the western culture in the classroom.

Considering all above-mentioned researches, it can, therefore, be concluded, on one hand, most educational institutions endorse a multicultural and diverse educational system; on the other hand, they fall short of meeting the needs of students having a different “racial” background or of those coming from a different culture, creating a situation that inevitably prevents these students from feeling a part of the community they are in. This unfavorable situation should lead the university authorities to address and eliminate each of these problems. The extent of how multiculturalism could fit into the curriculum would be worth elaborating on in a separate study as it falls outside the scope of the current research project.

2.6. Student Migration

After having explored the adaptive process that international students go through, it is also essential to present the factors that play into the students’ decision to study in a foreign country. Students prefer to study abroad for a variety of reasons. Creswell (2001, p. 328) states, “The causes for movement lie in locations that might be left and others which may be moved to.”, namely the causes lie in push and pull factors. The reasons will be explored in these two categories. According to McMahon (1992), push factors refer to the issues of the home country that force students to study abroad, while pull factors are related to the favorable economic and noneconomic circumstances that attract students to education abroad. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002, p. 3 & 4) mention three stages regarding how students go through the decision making process regarding education abroad, which are deciding to study abroad, choosing a host country, and choosing the university to study at, all of which are influenced by various push and pull factors.

Mazzarol, Kemp and Savery explain six different pull factors that affect students’ host country selection. (as cited in Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). To put it briefly, a) being

knowledgeable about the potential host country, b) recommendations of the host country by other people, c) low economic and social costs, d) students' positive thoughts on the host country environment, e) host country's geographical closeness to the home country, and f) having acquaintances still living in the host country or having studied in the host country before are all strong pull factors that students consider before making their final decisions (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002, p. 4).

Further, the findings of McMahon (1992) indicated that students coming from developing countries were driven to study abroad in accordance with several factors including the home country's economic status, how much of a priority education was for the government of the home country, and the educational opportunities provided by the home country. According to McMahon, students preferred to study abroad less when the home country is financially more prosperous. Among the pull factors, on the other hand, was funding opportunities offered by the host country to support the international students (McMahon, 1992). Further, for many African and Asian countries, one considerable push factor is that higher education is not easily accessible, while among the pull factors are the "commonality of language, the availability of science or technology-based programs and the geographic proximity of the home and host countries" (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002, p. 2).

International students with a Chinese background make up a considerably large percentage of the international student community. The reasons why Chinese students prefer to study abroad have kept changing over time (Wu, 2014, p. 427). Wu analyzes the reasons in two different time periods, before and after the 1990s. He explains that Chinese students' motivation before the 1990s was related to "...political, geostrategic, and cultural issues and considerations" (p. 427). Students went abroad for education to get a better grasp of Marxism and Leninism for the purpose of contributing better to the communist system of their countries (Yao, 2004, as cited in Wu, 2014, p. 427). Popular destinations for Chinese students were socialist countries including the former Soviet Russia and the Eastern Bloc countries (Wu, 2014, p. 427). For the motives after the 1990s, Wu (2014) mentions,

The political situation in China changed in the 1980s and 1990s, shifting from a planned economy to a socialist market-based economy; hence, the desired

destination countries for Chinese students broadened. Students were selected based on their political background and professional qualifications. Since the late 1990s, the reasons reported by individuals for studying overseas have become more complex; patterns have changed significantly in recent years (...) Individuals have more choices concerning destinations and fields of study (p. 427).

One of these common destinations for Chinese students is Britain. The study carried out by Wu (2014) indicated that experiencing different cultures, being exposed to native English speakers to improve their English language skills, and better career options in the future are suggested to be the main motivations for Chinese students to study in British universities (p. 438), which are also put forward by other studies on the subject (Han, Stocking, Gebbie & Appelbaum, 2015). It has also been found that postgraduate Chinese students studying in Britain prefer to study abroad because they want to benefit from free internet access, as they believe that, in this way, they will be able to learn about the rest of the world better, which they believe is very different from China (Wu, 2014, p. 431). This indicates that the Chinese government is placing strict restrictions on internet usage, which is obviously not approved of by young people. Furthermore, students' choice of certain British universities is related to whether they will return to China or stay in the host country. For most of the Chinese students, the universities they are studying at must still be acknowledged by the Chinese government today, as their plan is to return to China after they graduate (p. 434).

Career goals can play a part in international students' decision on whether to return or stay in the host country after graduation (Sahasrabudhe, 2007, as cited in Carson, 2008, p. 23). As stated by Sahasrabudhe, many Indian students in America preferred to stay in the host country after graduation due to the employment opportunities, the high standard of living, the experience they would receive working in America, and their parents' desire for them to continue their lives in America. Most of these factors are also confirmed by other studies (Tansel & Güngör, 2003). On the other hand, some students preferred to go back to India due to reasons including their emotional ties with their home country and family and friends there (Sahasrabudhe, 2007, as cited in Carson, 2008, p. 23). Besides all these factors, political instability can also be a reason why students would rather stay in the host country than return (Alberts & Hazen, 2006; Tansel and Güngör, 2003).

Concisely, as stated above, there are several push and pull factors noted in the literature regarding international students' decision to study at a university abroad. Among the push factors are the home country's low economic status, lack of importance given to education in the home country and lack of educational opportunities. Among the pull factors are funding options of the host country, similarities and geographical proximity between the two countries, high quality of education and educational programs, learning the English language, better future career options, recommendations by others, being knowledgeable about the host culture, and the like. Students' decision whether to return or stay in the host country is influenced by their closeness to their family, career goals and political circumstances in the home country. However, in the case of displaced students, the factors are naturally expected to be different from the above-mentioned ones.

In summary, providing several benefits for the host and the home countries notwithstanding, international students have to go through a challenging acculturative and adaptive process, for they have to undergo numerous changes to adapt to their new environments. Whether or not they intend to stay in the host country for a short period of time, this is the case for many international students. In this chapter, several issues have been explored by looking at the related literature to have a better insight into the international student experience globally. In this regard, acculturation and adaptation, culture shock, perceived discrimination, language related issues, and multiculturalism and diversity have been touched upon as the issues international students have to cope with. The chapter has been finalized with the subject of student migration, which suggested that students' decisions to study abroad and whether to stay in the host country are affected by various push and pull factors.

3. THE TURKISH BACKGROUND

As the current study takes place in a higher education institution in Turkey, this chapter will focus on the literature regarding the Turkish background in the context of the situation of Syrian refugees and Syrian university students.

3.1. Turkish-Syrian Relations

Syria is a Middle Eastern country in the south of Turkey, having borders with six Turkish provinces, Hatay, Kilis, Gaziantep, Şanlıurfa, Mardin and Şırnak. Turkey and Syria have always had tense relations throughout history. Historically, while the Arabs claim to have been exploited for long years by the Turks under the ruling of the Ottoman Empire, the Turks, on the other hand, claim to have been betrayed by the Arabs (Aslan, 2008, p. 23, as cited in Benek, 2016, p. 172). In more recent years, the problems between the two countries have stemmed from several issues including the disputes over the use of water resources, terrorism and violation of territorial integrity (Benek, 2016, p. 172; Aras & Mencütek, 2015, p. 198).

The Turkish-Syrian border was set by Ankara Agreement in 1921, and finalized in 1939 when Hatay province became a part of Turkish territory (Benek 2016, p. 180-181). However, social boundaries, undoubtedly, transcend the physical boundaries set by political agreements. The social relations between the people on both sides of the border, naturally, continued on account of their kinship and historical ties (Benek, 2016, p. 177). Even the people from the Syrian side were permitted to cross the borders to work in their fields on the Turkish side. Yet, this came to a halt when Turkey laid mines along the Syrian border in the late 1950s, signaling a declaration of martial law along the borderline, which contributed to the tense relations between the two countries, and also gave rise to smuggling and trafficking activities (Benek, 2016, p. 176-177). However, in 1998, when

Adana Agreement was signed between the two countries, the political and economic relations improved for the next twelve years (Benek, 2016, p. 172). Until the time when Syrian Civil war broke out in 2011, as part of the twelve-year rapprochement period between the two countries, Syria considered Turkey as a way to integrate into the global economy, whereas Turkey approached Syria as a door to economic markets of the Middle East (Hinnebusch & Tür, 2013, p. 159-160). In 2011, the rapprochement period ended when the Syrian civil war broke out between the Syrian opposition and Bashar Assad regime (Aras & Mencütek, 2015, p. 200). Consequently, Turkey, as a neighboring country, started to receive refugees fleeing the war in mass numbers, which has, inevitably, entailed effective measures to be taken for the integration of Syrian refugees.

3.1.1. The Syrian Civil War

Syria is a country comprised of several different sectarian divisions, Sunni being the most crowded one (Carpenter, 2013, p. 1-2). One main reason that ignited the civil war in Syria is the fact that the Assad family governing Syria for more than 40 years was Alawite, and they maintained their power in the government in alliance with the other minority sectarian groups until the Sunni Arabs rebelled to overthrow the “coalition of minorities regime” in 2011 (Carpenter, 2013, p. 1-2). In fact, the war in Syria started as a revolution, but later took the form of a civil war, as the conflicts engulfed the whole country and became violent in time.

There has been a civil war in Syria for about eight years now, and it is not likely that the war will end soon. The country is in ruins, and millions of Syrians have been displaced. The conflicts, unavoidably, affected the neighboring countries, Turkey and Lebanon being among the most impacted ones with high numbers of refugees received. According to the data retrieved from UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) on April 2019, the number of registered Syrian refugees in Turkey and Lebanon are 3.630.767 and 944.613 respectively, and the total number of registered Syrian refugees who are externally displaced has reached 5.667.168 (UNHCR, 2019), which indicates that the forced migration of the Syrian refugees may have alarming consequences for the countries receiving the refugees. As an increasingly overwhelming majority of the registered refugees is accommodated in Turkey, it is understood that the case of Syrian

refugees in Turkey deserves serious consideration and Turkey needs to find ways to tackle the rising numbers (İçduygu, 2015, p. 2).

Location Name	Population	
Turkey	64.1 %	3.630.767
Lebanon	16.7 %	944.613
Jordan	11.8 %	670.238
Iraq	4.5 %	253.672
Egypt	2.3 %	132.165
Other (North Africa)	0.6 %	35.713
Total	100 %	5,667,168

Figure 1: The Total Number of Registered Syrian Refugees by Country

https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria#_ga=2.244597953.598923335.1554912936-944615184.1554587279 Accessed on April 10, 2019

3.1.2. Syrian Refugees in Turkey

As stated in the previous section, Turkey is hosting the vast majority of the Syrians who have been displaced. Initially, it was widely assumed that the war would end before long, and the refugees would return to their home countries. Therefore, the Turkish government was in favor of hospitable policies regarding the Syrians in Turkey. In accordance with this lenient attitude, an open door policy was taken on, and the Syrians in Turkey were initially regarded as guests or visitors (İçduygu & Millet, 2016, p. 4). In fact, when considered legally, the Syrians in Turkey do not have refugee status or refugee rights. Turkey is a signatory to the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol, but it maintains a geographical limitation to people seeking asylum, which entitles refugee status and refugee rights only to those arriving from Europe, and this limitation, therefore, prevents the Syrians seeking asylum in Turkey from legally claiming refugee status (İçduygu, 2015, p. 4-5). Therefore, the term “refugee” used for the Syrians in Turkey in this study does not bear any legal connotations.

Syrians coming to Turkey to flee the war without passports were welcomed and permitted to enter the country, and the open door policy was taken as an ethical response to those facing the restless war in Syria. (Kirişçi, 2014, p. 14, 18). Though it should be mentioned that the lenience and viewing Syrians as guests were the proclamations of the government and were not universally followed by the populace. After 2013, the stay of most of the Syrians in Turkey turned out to be an extended or even a permanent one, and the number of refugees outside the camps started to rise (İçduygu, 2015, p. 7), which inevitably necessitated new regulations to be enacted. This is because the longer the refugees stayed in the country, the more complex the situation became for both the displaced Syrians and the Turkish people (İçduygu & Millet, 2016, p. 5). Consequently, a new Temporary Protection Regulation came into effect in 2014 (İçduygu, 2015, p. 9), and the status of Syrians in Turkey has been extended from “visitors” to “temporarily protected”, and now the likelihood of integration is increasing through citizenship (İçduygu & Millet, 2016, p. 5).

The fact is that migration for any reason may result in disagreements between its supporters and those who are cautious about the potential problems that may arise due to migration (Bahçekapılı & Çetin, 2015, p 1). Likewise, when Syrian refugees flooded into the country in large numbers and their stay turned out to be more of a permanent one, this situation inevitably led to various tensions in the country, including social and economic.

3.1.3. The Challenges Faced by Syrian Refugees in Turkey

There are numerous challenges Syrians have to tackle in Turkey, and a few of these challenges will be mentioned below. As a matter of fact, all the challenges, whether it be economic or social, are interconnected. In the first place, lack of livelihood opportunities is a serious challenge faced by the Syrians. About 12 % of the Syrians in Turkey are suffering from a complete lack of access to resources (Unicefturk, 2018), meaning that they are severely deprived of basic human needs. It is a fact that not all Syrians live in the camps established in the border cities. A vast majority of Syrians are scattered around different cities in Turkey. Syrians, especially those in larger cities, settle in poorer neighborhoods. Many Syrian families live together in small apartments in poor conditions in these neighborhoods. The underlying reason behind this situation is that they can only

afford to pay low rents (Orhan & Gündoğar, 2015, p. 16). The high number of Syrians looking for housing in Turkey also caused the rents and housing costs to increase, which led to concerns among Turkish citizens (İçduygu, 2015, p. 10).

Another concern is related to employment. In terms of employment, there is a high number of Syrians looking for jobs, many of whom fall in the potential trap of being exploited in poor work conditions. It has been reported that the lack of the legal rights to employment has led adult and child Syrian workers to be exploited in the fields of construction, textile, heavy industry and agriculture (Kirişçi, 2014, p. 21). In other words, as stated by Erdoğan (2014, p. 58), business owners may find it profitable to employ those in need who eagerly accept working for unfair compensation. Due to the desperate economic situation that they are in, Syrians accept working under these harsher conditions with lower payments than Turkish workers do, which causes hatred and resentment among Turkish citizens towards Syrians (Kirişçi, 2014, p. 21-22). Further, child labor is a big challenge faced by Syrian children in Turkey (Orhan & Gündoğar, 2015, p. 17). The financial burden on the shoulders of Syrian families give rise to a growth in child labor. Syrian children in Turkey are forced to either work in factories, in some other businesses, or beg for money on the streets.

Bearing these facts in mind, the question is whether Syrians give rise to job loss for local people. The data by the Turkish Statistics Institute from year 2013 revealed that unemployment has declined in different parts of Turkey, predominantly in Kilis, Gaziantep and Adıyaman, which indicates new labor market opportunities provided by the Syrians, partly due to Syrian business owners relocating their businesses to Turkey (Erdoğan, 2014, p. 58). Hence, it would be worth investigating this matter further in a separate study to fully understand all the intervening variables.

To put it briefly, the relationship of Syrian refugees and the local people has been determined by economic and social factors intertwined.

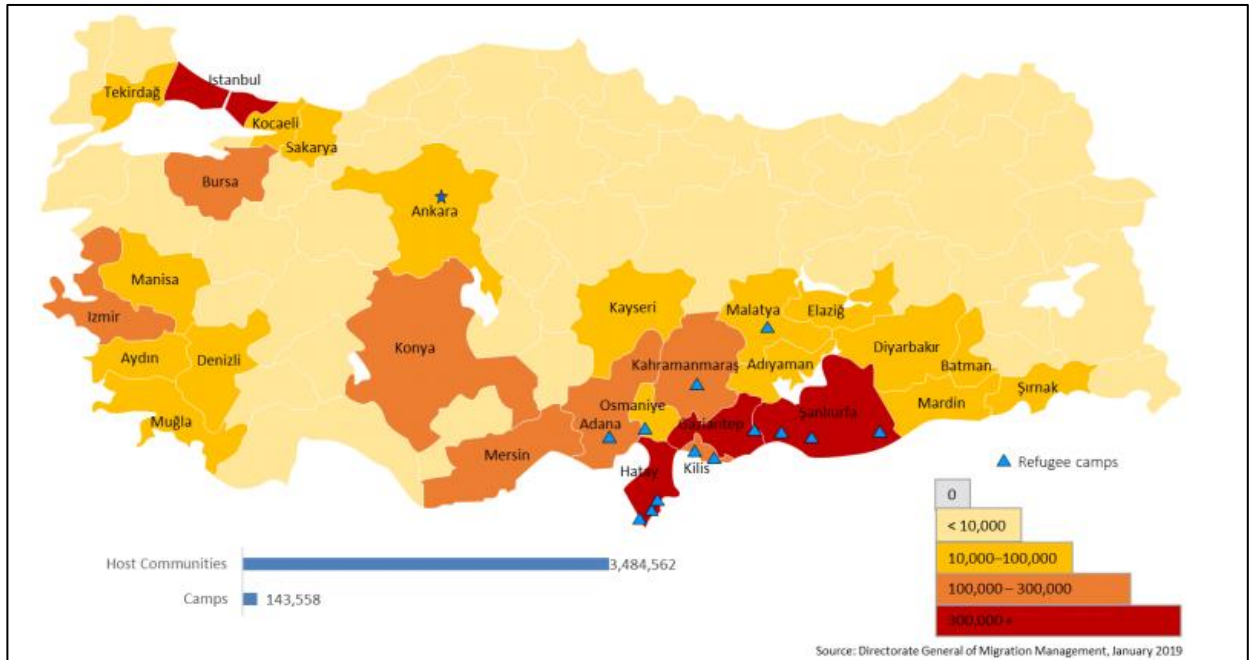


Figure 2: Syrian Refugee Population in Turkey (by Province)

UNICEF Turkey 2018 Humanitarian Results

<https://www.unicef.org/public/uploads/files/UNICEF%20Turkey%20Humanitarian%20Situation%20Report%20No.%2028%20-%20January-December%202018.pdf>

Another challenge of Syrian refugees in Turkey concerns healthcare and education. Unlike the refugees in the camps, those outside the camps, who comprise the majority, as mentioned earlier, face serious health related issues (Kirişçi, 2014, p. 27-28). This case is due to various reasons, including the huge numbers of Syrians seeking healthcare in hospitals, lack of information of healthcare workers about the regulations related to the Syrians' access to healthcare, complaints of local patients with regards to the quality of service they receive in hospitals, the risk of the spread of infectious diseases, and challenges in communication between the Syrian patients and healthcare workers due to language barrier (Kirişçi, 2014, p. 28-29). The education of Syrian children in Turkey is also a matter of concern. As reported by Unicef (2018), the total number of child refugees living in Turkey, including Syrian children, is over 1.7 million. While 645 thousand children have been registered at a school (over 500 thousand of them are Syrian children), 400 thousand children, most of whom are Syrian children, are still out of school as of January 2019. Besides being deprived of education, it is also reported that these children face the risk of encountering several problems that include being isolated,

discriminated against and exploited, and parents do not usually opt for sending their children to school in coping with these issues. According to a report published by Eđitim-Bir-Sen (2017, p. 1), the situation of the unschooled Syrian children and the importance of education for these youths are summarized as follows,

The crisis in education for Syrian children is expected to have serious repercussions for decades to come. By way of education, children can obtain the support they need to help them overcome the trauma of war and acquire the valuable skills they will need for their future occupations. When children are deprived of education, they lose their hope for the future and this in turn reinforces the cycle of poverty. The absence of education leads to ongoing social instability and impairs any hopes for restructuring. As a result, unschooled Syrian youth may lose any opportunities that would have been available to them if they were educated and instead will be pushed to the margins of society (p.1).

A study conducted in Kırıkhan district of Hatay indicated that Syrian families are facing financial problems, and problems regarding their legal status, which creates obstacles for the education of the children because parents have to spend a considerable amount of their income on their children's education, lack of required legal documents prevents parents from registering their children in schools (Dorman, 2014, p. 25), and children are compelled to contribute to the family budget (p. 46).

Briefly, Turkey is the country receiving the highest number of Syrian refugees, and Syrians in Turkey have been facing a wide array of issues, and the whole situation has given rise to reactions from the host population. As the main focus of this study, the case of Syrian university students will be elaborated on in the following section.

3.2. Educational Context

3.2.1. Descriptive Details about Turkish Higher Education System

Turkish higher education is administered by the Council of Higher Education (CoHE or YÖK), and Student Selection and Placement Center (SSPC or OSYM) is responsible for all standardized examinations in higher education. Turkish higher education consists of three types of institutions: state universities, foundation (private) universities and vocational schools of higher education. In these different types of higher education

institutions, students can get formal education at four different levels: associate's degree and bachelor's degree are undergraduate programs, and master's and PhD are graduate programs offered. The state universities are funded by the Turkish state, whereas student fees comprise the major part of the budget of foundation universities. Additionally, while the medium of instruction is Turkish in most universities, in some universities, it is English, German or French, and these universities have language preparatory programs for their students.

To be able to register at a university in Turkey, all high school graduates have to take the standardized university entrance exam, YKS, (Examination for Higher Education Institutions), and those with the required scores are eligible to apply to a university, and they are placed according to the quotas of the departments they have applied for. In Turkish higher education institutions, international students are educated, too. Until the year 2010, the eligibility of international students to enter a Turkish university was determined with YÖS (International Student Examination), a standardized examination for international students looking to study in Turkey. After 2010, the application of this examination was decentralized and transferred from OSYM to the universities themselves. That is to say, YÖS started to be applied at the discretion of the universities. Now, the universities who require the international students to take YÖS prepare their own examination and make the necessary announcements related to the examination themselves.

There was a time in Turkey when the higher education was thought to be an “elitist activity” instead of a requirement, yet in time, the importance of higher education started to be better understood, which correspondingly increased the demand for higher education (Aydın, 2014, p. 471). The number of students pursuing higher education grew dramatically over the years. When the most recent figures are taken into account, the growth can be clearly seen. Even in a period of 4 years from the academic year 2013-2014 to the academic year 2017-2018, the total number of university students went up by over 2 million. Moreover, more than a twofold increase can be seen in the number of international students. This marked increase can be attributed to several factors including relatively convenient international student mobility in today's globalized world,

governmental policies to draw international students to universities in Turkey (Watenpugh, Fricke, King, Gratien & Yılmaz, 2014, p. 24), and Syrians seeking education in Turkish education institutions due to the war in their home countries. As a matter of fact, between the academic years 2013-2014 and 2017-2018, the number of Syrian university students enrolled in Turkish universities multiplied more than tenfold. The following figures illustrate all above-mentioned statistics.

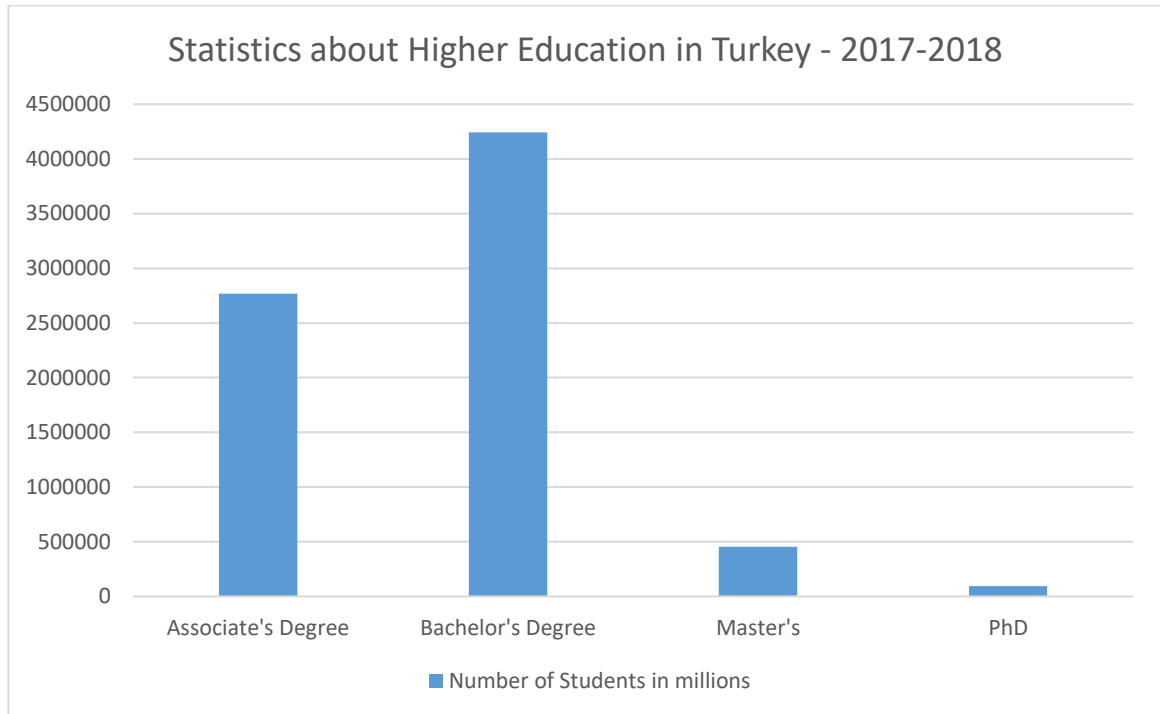


Figure 3: The Number of Students in Different Levels of Higher Education in Turkey – 2017-2018

<https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/> retrieved on April 21, 2019

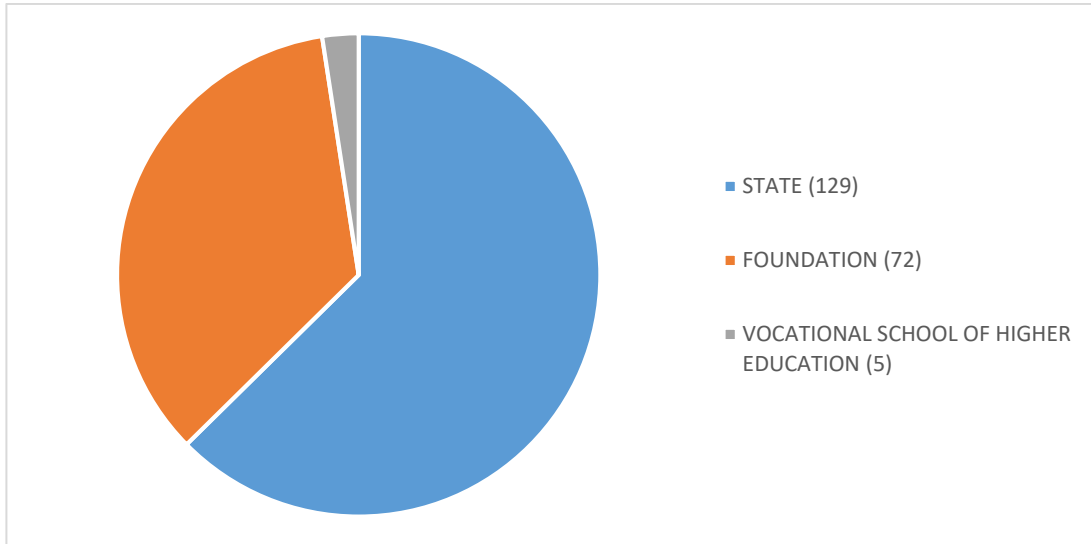


Figure 4: The Numbers and Types of Higher Education Institutions in Turkey

<https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/> retrieved on April 21, 2019

<u>Categories</u>	<u>2013-2014</u>	<u>2017-2018</u>
Total Number of University Students	5.619.079	7.560.371
Total Number of Foreign University Students	48.183	125.138
Total Number of Syrian University Students	1.785	20.071

Figure 5: The Numbers of All Students, Foreign Students and Syrian Students Registered in Higher Education in Turkey, 2013-2014 / 2017-2018

<https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/> retrieved on April 21, 2019

3.2.2. Syrian University Students in Turkish Universities

As mentioned in the previous section, the number of Syrian university students in Turkey has been on the rise, and according to the most recent statistics accessed on YÖK's website, the total number has reached 20.071. Among the few researches carried out on Syrian university students in Turkey, one of the most comprehensive ones is by Watenpaugh et al. (2014). Their research indicated that for the academic year 2013-2014,

the estimated percentage of Syrian student enrolment at universities was only 2 % of the total university-age Syrians (p. 6). At this point, it is important to note that despite the upward trend in the total enrolled Syrian student numbers (check figure 5), an overwhelmingly high number of Syrians (approximately 98 % for the academic year 2013-2014) still face difficulties in access to higher education in Turkey, as this minority population is constantly increasing. In this regard, several steps have been taken by the Turkish government. One of the steps taken is that as of 2013-2014, unlike other international students, Syrian students have been able to study at state universities without paying any tuitions (Hohberger, 2018, p. 17).

The research by Watenpaugh et al. (2014) was conducted with 30 university-age Syrians in Reyhanlı, Hatay. According to the findings, it is suggested that these Syrians, whether currently enrolled or unenrolled at a university, encounter a wide range of difficulties related to university education, including “lack of proper or incomplete documentation, financial concerns, and the transferability of past academic credits” (p. 5). Similarly, YÖK’s report of International Conference of Syrian Students in Turkish Higher Education System (2017) mentioned that the lack of proof of academic proficiency, incomplete documentation and problems about diploma equivalency certificates are among the problems of not only the students but also the academics, and it is stated that these matters are open to abuse. The report also mentioned that the majority of the Syrian refugees in Turkey is comprised of women and children, which also leads Syrian students to have financial concerns, as they also have to maintain their household, besides continuing their education. Eventually, they have to make a decision about whether to continue their education or not.

Further, Watenpaugh et al. (2014) point out that despite the opportunities, such as tuition-free enrolments, provided for the Syrian university students, access to information regarding these opportunities is very limited and oftentimes impossible for them, which prevents these students from benefiting from the opportunities (p. 44). It is reported that due to lack of access to information and limited counseling by the authorities, students mostly use forums on social media channels for academic counseling. They get

information from online groups sharing up-to-date information. Similarly, Yavcan and El-Ghali (2017) highlight the significance of academic support by stating,

...when the high school degree qualification and equivalency tests were offered by the MEB (Ministry of National Education) for the first time, many students were not aware and missed the exam. Since this exam was offered only once a year, an issue criticized by many in the field, prospective students had to wait another year to take the exam. This challenge contributed to bureaucratic hurdles and lack of communication between different institutions such as DGMM and MEB, consequently keeping a number of Syrian refugee students outside universities (p. 35).

Komşuoğlu and Yürür (2017) have examined the potential solutions for the challenges faced by university-age Syrians in Turkey in three categories. In the first place, Syrian students must be helped in the process of their transition from primary and secondary education to higher education. Komşuoğlu and Yürür point out that these youths need to be supported especially in the equivalency issue. Secondly, YÖK should work to make it easier for the Syrian youth to access higher education. As suggested by Komşuoğlu and Yürür, the problems that YÖK should address include language issues, incomplete documentation, lack of guidance and financial matters. Finally, the public must be well-informed about this matter, and it must be highlighted to them that education is a human right and the Syrian population has this right, too.

Additionally, Syrian students also encounter language related problems, as the higher education in Turkey is predominantly given in Turkish, and problems raised by the complex structure of Turkish higher education system (Watenpaugh et al. 2014, p. 5). These problems occur despite the constant efforts of the Turkish government to provide Syrians with opportunities to continue their higher education (p. 26). This may be explained by the ongoing and deep-rooted problems of Turkish education system, regardless of foreign student or specifically Syrian student admissions. Also, the admission process becomes complicated for many Syrian students due to the extra requirements introduced by the universities during the admission process (Yavcan & El-Ghali, 2017, p. 28). Kozikoğlu and Aslan (2018, p. 712) found that Syrian university students are struggling with the Turkish language, in both receptive and productive skills. These students stated that their language education is not adequately supported. Hohberger (2018, p. 28) found that the effectiveness of Turkish language courses are

limited, especially in terms of academic vocabulary, and for university programs, students reported that instructors speak Turkish even in programs designed in English. YÖK's report of International Conference of Syrian Students in Turkish Higher Education System (2017) suggested that Syrian students' Turkish proficiency, including the academic language usage, is highly important in higher education and should, thus, be dwelled on. Among the several ways suggested in the conference report to enhance the quality of language education for Syrians is the number of TÖMER (Turkish and Foreign Languages Research and Application Center) centers and MEB-assisted language centers to be increased and more opportunities of free language education to be offered.

Another problem faced by Syrian university students is related to their class attendance. According to a research done by Yavcan and El-Ghali (2017) in Turkey, especially in public universities, Syrian students tend to skip their classes 50 % of the time. Yavcan and El-Ghali attribute the poor attendance records to several factors including socialization problems, financial worries that compel students to work, and poor participation in class activities because of the language barrier (p. 38). They also found that in some universities, Syrian students are not very willing to participate in social activities in their universities, and even if some Syrians do, they do not tend to socialize with Turkish students but international ones. The socialization problem may be attributed to the language barrier, cultural differences and an "emotional distance" perceived by both sides (Hohberger, 2018, p. 29).

A feeling of discrimination perceived by Syrian students can also be a factor for their tendency towards social alienation. The members of the host country are worried that Syrians' long-term stay in Turkey will lead to unemployment, a rise in the rents, and so on, and accordingly, Syrian students suffer when looking for a job, a dormitory or internship and when renting a house, as house owners tend to charge Syrians more (Hohberger, 2018, p. 30). It is, therefore, inevitable for Syrian students to have difficulty adjusting to the host environment. Likewise, Kozikoglu and Aslan (2018, p. 714) state, "...Syrian students' being exposed to some racist discourses and behaviors could happen due to local people's concerns or prejudice towards Syrian students." Another likely result is that the Syrian students' feelings of unease and homesickness may be aggravated, yet

these psychological issues may not necessarily be a direct result of the bad treatments they are exposed to but may already exist in them due to their traumatic experiences. Nevertheless, how widespread these negative feelings are is debatable, as, according to a quantitative study carried out by Erdoğan and Erdoğan (2018, p. 271), over half of the Syrian university students participating in the study responded that their relationship with their Turkish friends is positive, while 40 % of them expressed that they do not have a good relationship with their Turkish friends.

As the war is going on in Syria, long-term goals of the Syrian youth is of high significance. According to the findings of Watenpaugh et al. (2014), in spite of the conflicts that have risen due to more and more Syrians becoming semi-permanent citizens who were previously regarded as “guests”, the experiences of university-age Syrians at universities and outside are usually positive (p. 45). Compared to metropolitan cities like Ankara and Istanbul, the tensions are more prevalent in the south of Turkey, which is closer to the Syrian border (p. 45). As for the likelihood of settling in Turkey, it has been reported that quite a high percentage of Syrians wish to stay in Turkey permanently (p. 45). Similarly, Erdoğan and Erdoğan (2018, p. 273) report that the percentage of the Syrian university students wishing to stay in Turkey is more than 50 %, and their study concludes that over 80 % of them will likely not return to their home countries.

Briefly, the ongoing turmoil in Syria has profoundly affected not only Syria, but also the neighboring countries, especially Turkey. Since the onset of the war, millions of Syrians have had to flee their countries in pursuit of a safe environment for the continuation of their lives. Turkey is currently hosting as many as 3,630,767 Syrians. While some of the Syrians live in refugee camps established in the border cities, the majority of the Syrians pursue their lives in the major cities of Turkey facing problems of poverty, exploitation, lack of education and discrimination. The education of the displaced Syrian youth at university age has been the primary focus of this chapter. The chapter has provided a background of Syrian-Turkish relations, briefly explained the situation of Syrian people in Turkey, described the Turkish higher education system, and finally elaborated on the problems that the Syrian university students in Turkey are facing. Referring to different sources from the literature, it has been found that Syrian university students face various

difficulties before and after they are admitted to a higher education program in Turkey, which needs to be addressed by the authorities.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research Paradigm

For the present study, a qualitative research approach has been used in order to comprehensively explore the students' experiences throughout their adaptation process in Turkey. To this end, in-depth, semi-structured interviews and a focus group interview have been held with the Syrian students, followed by an inductive approach of analysis that has allowed patterns and themes to unfold from what they shared about themselves. Using a qualitative data collection method allows the inspection of people's thought processes, which is quintessential for this type of study. As Seidman (2006, p. 9) states, the aim of conducting in-depth interviews is not to get certain answers to questions or evaluate the participants, but to understand their experiences and how they make sense of their own experiences. In qualitative interviews, the aim is to allow the participants to freely interpret the situations that they are in or have been through using their own way of expression, and to see the world from their perspectives (Kvale, 2008, p. 481). In qualitative studies, it is assumed that the world is a place in which human interaction is personal and people perceive phenomena subjectively, which makes them hard to measure, and stresses the importance of interpretations (Merriam, 1988, p. 17). However, in quantitative studies, the researcher "identifies a research problem based on trends in the field or on the need to explain why something occurs", and while describing a trend, "...the researcher seeks to establish the overall tendency of responses from individuals and to note how this tendency varies among people." (Creswell, 2012, p. 13), which indicates a deductive approach, rather than an inductive one. That is why, a qualitative research approach has been endorsed in this study, and the data collected has been organized from the details to the whole picture (Creswell, 2012, p. 262).

For the research, a semi-structured interview, rather than a structured interview, has been used. According to Bryman (2012), a structured interview requires each participant to be given “the same interview stimulus” and the researcher to ask the participants a set of questions in a very controlled manner following the order of the questions on paper. The questions are closed ended in nature, and thereby limit the participants to a narrow range of answers (p. 210). On the other hand, in semi-structured interviews, the questions are more open-ended, and they allow the researcher to ask further questions when necessary for the participants to elaborate on the important responses and to make clarifications. The researcher can also change the order of the questions during the interview if necessary (p. 487, 716). Briefly, semi-structured interviews are more flexible in nature, which is more suitable for qualitative research approach than structured interviews.

Furthermore, as stated above, the research has been supported with a focus group interview. A focus group interview is a method including more than one, generally about four participants, and it enables the group members to construct meaning jointly by interacting with each other (Bryman, 2012, p. 501-502). It is an important qualitative research tool as it provides a thorough understanding of a topic of interest and efficiency at the same time (Creswell, 2014, p. 67). It is also defined as “a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment” (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 2). Therefore, to obtain in-depth data about the Syrian university students in Turkey, a focus group interview comprised of four Syrian students has been conducted along with individual qualitative interviews.

Therefore, for the case of Syrian university students in Turkey, using a qualitative research approach through semi-structured interviews and a focus group interview, and inductive analysis of data has been regarded as the most suitable way to collect and interpret data.

4.2. Participants

The participants of the individual interviews are fifteen Syrian students who are studying at a foundation university in the city of Istanbul in Turkey. In addition to the individual

interviews, the focus group interview included four Syrian students from the same university. The university has been chosen for the accessibility and the number of potential participants within it. It is an international university receiving foreign students from various countries each year, and the medium of instruction in most departments of the university is English. For ethical concerns and out of respect for the participants' right to privacy, the name of the university will be kept confidential by the researcher.

When it comes to the backgrounds of the participants, fourteen students from the individual interviews are undergraduate students, and one of them is a master's student. Six female and nine male students were interviewed individually in total. The focus group interview was comprised of two female and two male students. Three of the participants are undergraduate students, and one of them is a master's student.

Further, none of the students are married. The age range is between 18 and 28, but they are mostly in their early 20s. Arabic is their native language, and almost all of them know two foreign languages, mainly Turkish and English, with varying degrees of fluency. Considering the backgrounds of the participants, it can be stated that most of the participants belong to the middle class in Syria. Their date of entry to Turkey range from one to seven years. Some of the participants moved to Turkey with their families, and so they live with them, some of them live in the dormitory of their university, and some of them live off campus with roommates. Some of the participants still have immediate family members living in different parts of Syria.

Another significant aspect of the participants, as stated by them, is that they have been negatively affected by the war in their homeland. Events, such as the destruction of their houses or being in the vicinity of bombings, have caused them to look at the world in a different light and some of them to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorders, such as having sleep interruptions at night or reacting negatively to certain sounds. Some participants have suffered losses of loved ones. Also, one participant got injured in the war and now has a prosthetic leg.

4.3. Administration of the Interviews

The interviews were held in five months, from December to April 2019. The sampling of the participants were done through snowball sampling. It is a way of sampling in which the researcher reaches participants with the recommendations of earlier participants and the process continues in this way until the interviews are complete (Bryman, 2012, p. 424). The participants of the present study contacted their friends with similar backgrounds and provided the researcher with their contact information if they were willing to participate in the study. The researcher met the participants on the campus of their university, and the interviews were carried out in a quiet room in a school building.

Further, qualitative interviews rely on face-to-face human interaction, and so to alleviate any potential problems and have effective interviews, active listening is of high significance. Seidman (2006) suggests three levels of listening during interviews. The first level involves listening to understand what is being said. Seidman says, "...They [the researchers] must concentrate so that they internalize what participants say" (p. 78). Secondly, it is important to be able to differentiate the participants' genuine opinions as opposed to their more generic responses given to fit the, in their opinion, typical and ideal expectations of others. Finally, the third level of listening is about being aware of the interview process, the time, how the interview is progressing, and so on. The researcher of the current study has cautiously followed these three levels of listening during the interviews. When it comes to the naming of the participants, Seidman (2006) states, "...At the heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individuals' stories because they are of worth. That is why people whom we interview are hard to code with numbers, and why finding pseudonyms for participants is a complex and sensitive task." (p. 9). To this end and also in order to keep the privacy of the participants, appropriate pseudonyms were provided for each participant, and they were informed that their names would be kept confidential. Also, to provide a stress-free interview atmosphere, the participants were told that they could take breaks if they needed to, and the interview was carried out in the language that the students felt comfortable with, namely English, Turkish or Arabic.

In reporting qualitative interviews, participants' statements must be used in detail wherever needed, and so while getting consent from the participants, they must be clearly

informed to what extent their words would be used (Seidman, 2006, p. 72-73). Therefore, the participants of the present study were informed accordingly. Their consent for the recording and extensive use of data was asked verbally. The interview included background questions to determine each participants' specific circumstances, and questions that would uncover the details and the meaning of the relevant experiences of the participants. Each interview, including the focus group interview, lasted between thirty-five minutes to one hour. All the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to be later referred to. The data has been thematically analyzed to determine the commonalities and differences between the individual responses of the participants.

The approach used to analyze and explain the interviews was from the researcher's perspective. Eriksen (2001) mentions this approach as "the view from the outside" (p. 36). To elaborate, Eriksen mentions the distinction between "emic" and etic" approaches (p.36). While emic approach concerns "life as experienced and described by the members of a society themselves", etic approach is the "analytical descriptions or explanations of the researcher" (p. 36). He also notes that anthropologists strive to relay the reality through the informants' perceptions, but because of possible shortfalls of language translations, possible changes in meaning when the data is transferred from oral to written form and because of the impossibility of being identical to people written about, the approach can never be truly emic regardless of the intention (p. 36). In light of this information, it can be stated that the researcher of the current study used an etic approach in the process of meaning making from the interview data obtained. Namely, the similarities and differences between the Syrian students' responses were analyzed by the researcher using theoretical tools of social sciences.

	Details
Research Paradigm:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A qualitative research approach • Individual, face-to-face interviews • A focus group interview • Semi-structured interview questions • An inductive analysis of data
Participant Details:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual interviews: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → 15 Syrian university students → 14 undergraduate students & 1 master's student → 6 female and 9 male participants • Focus group interview: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → 4 Syrian university students → 3 undergraduate & 1 master's student → 2 female and 2 male participants • All single • Ages between 18-28 • Length of stay in Turkey: 1 to 7 years • Living with their families, friends or in a dormitory
Interview details:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Snowball sampling • Carried out at the university campus • Pseudonyms used • Verbal consent asked for the use of interview data • English, Turkish and Arabic used (mainly English) • Audio-recorded and transcribed

Figure 6: A Brief Summary of the Methodology of the Study

5. ENTRY TO TURKEY AND INITIAL IMPRESSIONS

Syrian students who participated in this study are unique in that they have arrived in Turkey due to forced migration, and, as displaced people, their perspective on the host country as well as their reception by it requires exploration. In this chapter, a wide variety of concerns, namely 1) their reasons for leaving Syria, 2) their initial and continuing impressions of Turkey and Turkish people, 3) their methods of financially supporting their education, 4) the available on-campus services for them to take advantage of, 5) and their interpersonal relationships on campus will be investigated in relation to the interview data obtained by the researcher.

5.1. Reasons for Leaving Syria

Before exploring further, it should be noted that push and pull factors mentioned by McMahon (1992), partially influence the decisions of Syrian students in their attempts to resettle after being displaced from Syria. Recommendation and proximity factors, along with having relatives in the host country influenced, at least in part, the participants' decision to choose Turkey as their destination (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). However, when it comes to push factors, a great deal of variation from the literature was observed.

5.1.1. Fear of Bodily Harm and Loss of Loved Ones

As one might suspect, the initial and perhaps the most pressing cause for the displacement of Syrians reported by the participants is the fear of death, either of themselves or their loved ones. This is in direct relation to the severity of the conflicts in Syria, as depicted clearly by Sorenson (2016),

Violence has convulsed Syria, shattered its long period of religious accommodation, destroyed much of its history, and doomed the war's survivors to generations of rebuilding once the war stops. There have been few countries that have suffered so much destruction on such a wide scale (p. 2).

Ferris, Kirişçi and Shaikh (2013, p. 12) state that a lot of Syrians were internally displaced because civilians were randomly shot at or attacked by the infantry, and many left their countries because of bombings and not to be targeted at by the military. Similarly, in the current research, as participants were sharing the stories of why they could no longer stay in the country, bombings, existence of landmines, and constant infantry clashes were reported frequently. For example, Harun (22), who was 17 when he left Syria, shared the following story,

We would always hear the sounds [of war], always see things. We were right at the border of war. We would hear and see it all. Once, we were staying at home altogether as family. When the war started, the schools closed, so my sisters also came over to our place. I was also there, helping my father. So, a couple months before we came here [to Turkey], they bombed our home. We were in the house, but fortunately it wasn't a big bomb and only our kitchen got damaged. My little sister and cousin were wounded. After that, we left our home.

Stories such as this are not uncommon and paint a chilling picture of how close Syrians came to losing their lives daily, where only having a sister and a cousin wounded is considered fortunate. In fact, Naim (21), who was 15 when he arrived in Turkey, had a far more difficult story to tell,

I had a girlfriend [...] She didn't want to come here because her parents weren't buying the idea of coming to Turkey. She went to Aleppo to have some documents. She had an exam I guess. And a rocket hit the house and she passed away. [...] One of my cousins who I used to live with and grow up with I knew him from 3 years old. We grew up together. He was the same age with my brother. He was younger than me but we used to live together. Last year he was going to his home in Syria back from his school. He got shot by a sniper. He was like 16 years old. He died instantly. The schools are open now, but it is not safe every single day because problems happen here and there. And my uncle and his son passed away last year too. There was like a week between them. Both stepped on a landmine in Syria. My cousin opened the door. They didn't know somebody planted a mine in their house. He just opened the door and stepped on the mine. After a week, my uncle was going to make a phone call and usually when you make a phone call, you just walk... He was walking around his house. He stepped on a landmine too. He passed away too.

As Naim's story clearly portrays, death was becoming a common occurrence for many, and relocation to Turkey becoming a matter of survival was a shared theme in the participants' stories. Some continued discussing the news of how their loved ones or acquaintances are still suffering from physical harm.

5.1.2. Widespread Shortages of Basic Necessities

In addition to the ever-present danger of bodily harm, another just as critical crisis began to emerge. Living became increasingly complicated due to the scarcity of Syrians' basic needs such as food, water, and electricity. Harun explains the situation before his family decided to leave for Turkey as follows,

After that, work got really scarce. Living conditions [were] reduced. Electricity, water, bread even... I mean, to buy bread, we had to spend half the day at the bakery. You would spend it waiting in line. Also, you could not buy a lot of bread [to stockpile]. They were sold in packages and every package contained 11 or 12. It's just that living got really difficult over there [Syria] without [before] coming here [Turkey]. That's when we decided to move over here.

Shortages and rationing are not uncommon in times of crisis, and Harun's story attests to that. It should also not be forgotten that having to wait for extended periods outside would mean that people waiting would be out of shelter and in danger of bodily harm as discussed previously. To add to Harun's story, Jamil (20), who was 15 when he left the country, shared that even when the necessities were available, they were not easily accessible.

There was a war, so there was a rise in prices. Everything was really expensive. The military was opening fire at people. There were no job opportunities [to keep up with the price increase].

It was a complicated situation where people would have to place themselves in great deal of danger to acquire their basic needs while those needs would keep getting harder to acquire, in addition to coming in more limited quantities as time went by. Ferris et al. (2013) summarize the situation by stating,

When people lose their jobs and cannot access basic services, they move to areas where they are able to survive, often first within the country and then later across a border (p. 13).

5.1.3. Breakdown of the Justice System and Increase in Crime Rate

Apart from the immediately harmful factors like physical harm and lack of basic needs, according to the participants' reports, Syria's law enforcement was also in a state of chaos. Ferris et al. (2013, p. 12) note that there were signs of violations of human rights and worries, in particular, about the expanding sectarian nature of the civil war.

About the violation of human rights, Hilmi (28), who arrived in Turkey at the age of 25, shared the story of his arrest and imprisonment due to war,

Almost three years, I was in the prison, in the jail in Syria. [...] Because I was filming the people who was on the street, wanting the government to change, and I was filming those people, uploading those videos on YouTube, and sending to channels. I am against the government, so that's why, I got into prison for 4 years. When I got out, I decided to move to Turkey because in Syria, the situation was too bad.

According to his description, a wider variety of activities became punishable by incarceration, potentially as a way of controlling information. Of course, this was not the only example of unusual legal punishment, as Jamil explained the situation his father has been in back in Syria,

The police arrested my father because sometimes when an undeveloped country has a criminal, they catch anyone to close the case. That's why, they caught my father. Once he got out, once he was free, we moved to Turkey.

Jamil shared his thoughts on how the police was no longer interested in investigating to find the truth and instead took shortcuts wherever possible. He linked it to Syria being “an undeveloped country” in the quote, which suggests that it may not be a new occurrence, but war and the increasing rate of crime that comes with it may have played a factor in the negligent police investigation. Amira (20), who was 17 when she left Syria, briefly discussed the following, which could confirm the increasing crime rate,

We were in Syria, 4 daughters and a mother. We left home because soldiers were constantly entering the house. My mother became really worried, so we moved to my aunt's house and stayed there for two months. But then we heard that 4 girls from my sister's university got kidnapped and raped. After that, we stopped going to school and my father told us to come to Turkey.

Increasing crime rate, compounded by the lax investigation of the police and the expansion of what constitutes criminal behavior complicated the lives of these students and their relatives, adding yet another cause for their displacement.

5.1.4. Conscription

Another factor that pushed some of the participants in the study away from Syria was the conscription. Syria has a mandatory conscription program, where at the age of 18, male

citizens are called to serve. War, however, caused the enlistment criteria to expand. Harun shared the following on the matter,

I reached the conscription age. My brother already served in the military and was finished with his service, but since there is a war going on right now, they were taking anyone military age or older. Also, I should say that there is no point in serving in the military, because it is a large war. Who are we going to stand against? I mean we will face our own countrymen. No matter which side [I stand for], I will stand against my countrymen.

Even when they were done with the mandatory military service, citizens could not be forced back in service. More importantly, as Harun pointed out, people were unwilling to participate in the first place because the “enemy” they were supposed to fight against were other citizens like them. It was a very difficult situation from which some went to great lengths to escape. The following story by Khalid (23), who was 18 when he left Syria, illustrates the point,

So, we tried to find a way to go out of the city, and at the time I was in the age when I should be a university student. We found out [about] Turkey. [...] And going, our way was very hard. We had to go from my hometown Homs to Lebanon because there was no airport in our city. Actually, there was, but you could not use it because of the war, so we had to go to Lebanon. And then from Lebanon we had to use their airport to come to Turkey. I had never travelled before, even travelling was a new thing for me, so the way was very hard. The military was everywhere. When they saw a student our age, it was very risky for us because they had to take [conscript] those kinds of people. They had to take them to military, something like that. But it worked out. We had to pay something to them, so they can leave us alone. It was very hard. It took a very long time.

Having to travel across borders, hoping to not get caught at military checkpoints to avoid being sent to war as a soldier seems to have taken its toll on Khalid as he kept mentioning how difficult it was. He also pointed out towards the end of his story that bribes were commonly accepted by soldiers in return for letting people pass. Another participant, Amira, had also reported that they had to give her mother’s gold bracelets to the soldiers to buy passage. In any case, conscription was too widespread for many to stay in the country safely.

5.1.5. Education Halted

Especially at the early stages of the war, school-age Syrians were also facing a major complication. As pointed out by the participants in the study, many schools were closed due to war and education had come to a halt. Here is Naim's explanation of why his family decided to move to Turkey,

Actually, in the area I was living in [Aleppo], the education stopped. A lot of people started to go to other cities. There wasn't a lot of opportunities to study or to continue studying. And for us as a family, actually, all of us wanted to continue our studies, like getting master's and PhD degrees and so on, so we moved to the city for about a year or two. Then we realized that there was no chance to continue studying. It was not safe to stay there, so we tried to move to a country that was available for us, so we can continue our study.

Though there were schools that continued education, as Amira mentioned earlier in the chapter, there were Syrians like Naim and his family who had no opportunity to continue their education anymore and had to relocate to create opportunities for themselves.

5.2. Impressions of Turkey and Turkish People

Since the Syrian students started living in Turkey, they have made numerous observations regarding Turkey, Turkish people, and Turkish culture. The common themes that emerged out of what the students shared in the interviews have been categorized as "Diversity is Everywhere", "Familiar Religion", "Stressful City Life", "Highly Political Society" and "Inquisitiveness". It is important to note that since the students have lived in Istanbul for the most part of their stay in Turkey, care should be taken in generalizing their findings. Also, students' impressions could be based on what kind of a place they lived in Syria.

5.2.1. Diversity is Everywhere

After students participating in the study shared their impressions, common themes emerged, though each carrying different connotations depending on the participants. Diversity can be considered as the most prominent example of that. By diversity, what is meant is the different lifestyles existing in the environment. Khalid shared his thoughts on the matter as the following,

Here in Turkey, there is something I like. In Turkey, we have many different societies. You can see that demographically, they are spread in different parts. You see that Taksim is different than Fatih, and Fatih different than Başakşehir. They are different, so here in Turkey, in Istanbul especially, my perspective is that no matter how you wish to live, you can find a place for it. [...] And the differences here in Turkey, I think... there is no problem with the differences. People are accepting each other. I think you can adapt quickly.

Though Khalid says Turkey in some parts, his story talks mainly about the way people live and behave in different parts of Istanbul and how, depending on the kind of company one wishes to keep, it simplifies finding a place for oneself in it. Considering the cosmopolitan nature of Istanbul, Khalid's observation seems to be conceivable. Finding some place to fit in is not an issue for Khalid, an opinion, unfortunately, not shared with some other participants. Rather than in terms of place, Souzan (22), who was 19 when she arrived in Turkey, briefly focused on the people in her explanation,

And I don't like one thing. There are too many differences between people. You can come across a really good person and you can come across a really bad person. In between, it is too rare to find. Sometimes they hate us, sometimes they love us, so you can't know if they hate you or love you, so you can't say anything.

Maya (21), who was 17 at the time of her arrival, echoed Souzan's thoughts almost word for word in her definition, mentioning how it scares her sometimes. Amira also shared that she felt safe in Ümraniye, where she lives but another location, Kadıköy, feels very foreign, making her afraid to go there alone, until she knows the location well enough to navigate. It was interesting to hear how the diversity and variety of locations and opinions cherished by some ended up eroding the familiarity, predictability, and of course safety feelings of others, at least initially.

5.2.2. Familiar Religion

One aspect of Turkey universally reported as positive by the participants was the religion. Since Syria and Turkey share a common religion, which is Islam, students found it easy to fulfill their religious needs. This data is in line with the findings from the literature that stress the benefits of cultural similarities in terms of easing students' adaptation to their new environment (Kim & Kim, 2016; Poyrazli et al., 2010; Alemu & Cordier, 2017).

Khalid shared what he thought on the matter,

I have some friends who went to Europe and they were asking me, “You graduated. Why don’t you apply for master here?” For me, I don’t prefer living there. I prefer living here because here practicing for Muslims is perfect. You can see mosques everywhere. Wherever you want to pray, you can go, so I like here the living for Muslims. I like the way of living.

On a similar note, Harun said, “I haven’t had any trouble in terms of worship. Thank God the prayer call can be heard anywhere here”. Many students in the study pointed out Islam as a particularly strong (if not defining) reason for their stay in Turkey.

5.2.3. Stressful City Life

The main negative impression that emerged through the interview was related to Istanbul being a city. To specify, the never-ending movement of people and frequent traffic were brought forth as a cause for concern. Anwar (22), who has been in Turkey for the past 5 years, said the following,

Istanbul is different from any city because there is a lot of stress, you know. If you speak with a taxi driver in Istanbul, you don’t expect the same attitude from a taxi driver in Ankara, for example. There is no traffic there that makes you stressful. So, the nature of the city is like it is very stressful, crowded. This makes people stressful all the time and want to fight sometimes. I feel like all the big cities are the same. Maybe they have their own life, so they are stressful and angry when you speak with them, especially taxi drivers.

An interesting commonality among some of the participants’ opinions on why people are angry is their attribution of anger towards them to the stress of living in a city. Especially the taxi drivers are brought forth as a common example of angry citizens. Khalid provided the following comment on the matter,

They get angry quickly. That’s what I can say, especially when they are driving. I don’t know maybe it is just here in Istanbul you see because everyone is rushing. It is very stressful. For me, I prefer to live outside of Istanbul because it is very crowded, very stressful; everyone is rushing. I don’t like living in such a situation.

He is not the only student who said he is worn out by the situation. During the focus group interviews, for example, Aisha (22) had this to say,

On the metro, I run with people. Then I stop, “Why am I running? I am tired, I am on time. No need.” You rush it with them, but you are not in a rush at all, but you feel that. I don’t like this kind of stressful situations.

These comments point out a potential difficulty in their adaptation and a possible cause for some of the anger they have felt from the citizens. However, it should be noted that, as Anwar's comment states, this issue could be the byproduct of urban growth and could be faced in any city large enough, rather than being specific to Turkey.

5.2.4. Highly Political Society

Another impression Syrian students had of Turkey that is mixed in nature is how involved people seem to be in politics. Although some participants discussed this issue as something that mainly affects the relationships among Turkish people, others pointed out its effects on the foreigners. Latif (27), who has been living in Turkey for the past 4 years, had the following to say,

I think the Turkish society is more politicized than any society. There are different groups. I remember one day, I wanted to move from one dorm to another. One friend said, "I don't suggest you that dorm." I asked why, and he said, "they have some political opinions." I didn't understand what he meant. I didn't know that group. This political issue interferes even if you are a foreigner. I am kind of stressed because there are different ideologies, different opinions, more harsh. Some people criticize both sides. These are my general observations. They have the need to show themselves off like "I am the winner" or "I got the victory", or they just want to destroy the other side. There is kind of strong language between them. It is not easy to meet them, speak with them together. It is not all the people, but it interferes all the lives. The neighborhoods, it is like if you take the flag of one party, they are like what are you doing here? I just observed it. There is this kind of conflict between them, a strong one.

Latif's description touches upon some of the groupings that exist within the society and how they have divided the community. Mehdi (24), who has been in Turkey for the past 7 years, and Khalid also shared Latif's sentiments, mentioning that Turkish people around them are interested in politics and everything is related to that in some way. Finally, Khalid pointed out that whenever he observed discussions among Turkish people who are strangers to one another, he would notice them trying to figure out each other's political affiliations.

The need to become "winners" and "destroy the other side" mentioned by Latif is particularly alarming. This occurrence of taking sides is called an "imagined kin group" by Gee (2013), which is defined as "any group someone sees as people 'like me' (people

with whom they feel bonded and to whom they feel obligated in some sense) when the group goes beyond actual biological or legit kin” (Part 1, Chapter 12, para 13). Gee goes on to mention that such groups can turn pathological (extreme, or significantly abnormal) very quickly, ignore other perspectives and critique, begin sharing extreme and narrow views, and become open to manipulation when they isolate themselves from others, similar to how dorms and neighborhoods were separated by their affiliations in Latif’s example.

5.2.5. Inquisitiveness

The final commonly shared impression is also mixed in nature and is related to the curious nature of the population. According to the students participating in the study, they were frequently subjected to different kinds of inquiry, or felt under watch. Souzan shared her experience as the following,

This year, we are living in Orhantepe. The bazaar is near. People are always looking at us. What time do we enter our home? What time do we go? Even when my mother came, they were like, “Your mother came home. She has a small daughter.” They know everything about what we are doing in our home. Even the owner of the home, he said, “Please be careful. We are sisters and brothers. Close your curtains carefully because sometimes I can see you.” They care about every single stuff. He said, in the beginning when we were trying to rent the home, “Be polite, don’t let boys come to the house, don’t drink, don’t do that stuff” because he has girls. His younger daughter is in grade 7, 13 years old. “For my daughters’ sake I don’t want a bad reputation, so please be careful.”

From her accounting, it sounded like Souzan and her roommates were under constant observation. Interestingly, considering the questions and warnings directed towards them, it sounded like they were mainly observed to see how well they would be able to fit in. Rather than renting an apartment, it is as if they are actually buying entry to an exclusive club. However, it is not a behavior faced exclusively by foreigners, as conservative communities tend to observe newcomers regardless of their origin. This can also be explained by the gender role expectations in the society. The neighbor expects them to be polite, close their curtains, not let boys in the apartment and portray a good example for his daughters. These are among gender roles females are expected to perform in relatively traditional societies.

On a similar note, Lely (22), who arrived in Turkey a year and a half ago, recounted her own encounters with the native curiosity in the following quote,

Most people living in Fikirtepe are Turkish, and when they see me, they try to simplify what they want, and they keep asking, “*Nerelisin, neredede oturuyorsun?*” (Where are you from? Where do you live?). At first, I was answering, “*Suriyeliyim.*” (I am from Syria) and so on, but then they keep asking, sometimes personal questions, so at first, I was answering every question. I felt like they were right, but then when I saw that it is a behavior of all Turkish people, I stopped, and I said none of your business. But in general, they are kind.

Both of these examples share a common thread, which is the need of the community to determine whether these newcomers are one of them or not. This could once again be a case of establishing “imagined kin group” (Gee, 2013). In Souzan’s example, the community does that through observation, while in Lely’s case, it is through questioning.

5.3. Funding

It should be noted that Syrian students at foundation universities are required to pay for their education, unlike those in state universities, who do not pay tuition.

5.3.1. Family Support

Syrian students have a variety of ways to support their education, starting with the family support. Family support in this case refers to the parents partially or completely covering the costs of the students’ education and meeting their financial needs throughout their studies. Most of the students in the study stated that they rely on their families for the funding of their education. For example, Sayid (19), who came to Turkey just a year ago, shared that his father currently covers 40% of his education while the rest is covered by a scholarship. Hilmi also mentioned that his father covers most of the costs of his education. Yara (22), who has been in Turkey for the past 5 years, stated that her father and uncle have a factory of olive oil in Syria, and it is still working, and that is how they earn their income and how her family helps her financially. On a similar account, Jamil mentioned that his father imports dentistry products from Germany and sells them with a Turkish business partner, and this way, his father can financially support his education.

5.3.2. Scholarships

Another major source of funding for students is scholarships. In Sayid's case mentioned earlier, the university he is attending is providing him with a 60% scholarship. Amira is receiving 75% scholarship from his university. Khalid received a 60% scholarship while completing his undergraduate degree, and a full scholarship for his master's degree. Yara also mentioned that she has a 50% scholarship from the university. Finally, Hilmi also stated that he has a scholarship but did not specify the exact amount.

It is important to note that these scholarships are not specific to Syrian students. They are all accessible to other students admitted to the university. Amira even mentioned that in the case of her scholarship, the amount Turkish students get is greater than hers, as being an international student reduced it to 75% instead of 100%. Participants wanted to particularly stress that these were not Syrian-specific benefits, as that assumption caused a great deal of headache for them, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Besides the scholarships received from their own universities, the students also get scholarships or aid from different organizations. One of the participants, Khalid, discussed an example where he mentioned receiving aid from an NGO named Homs League Abroad. It was defined by the student as a civil society organization that has a number of projects including providing financial support to Syrian students. Moreover, Harun mentioned that his high school in Fatih, called Akademi İstanbul (Academy Istanbul), is covering 50% of his tuition, as he graduated from his high school as one of the top students.

5.3.3. Work Opportunities

Some of the participants reported that they have found employment on campus working for the university. Harun, for example, reported that he found employment as student-worker at student affairs for a year and later started working at a research lab on campus. Another participant, Khalid, also mentioned that he works at a research lab on campus as a coordinator. One more example of on campus work, provided by Anwar, was with an organization called TÖMER. Anwar mentioned that he worked with the organization and gave language courses to students.

A unique case of employment was brought forth by Hilmi, who had previously reported as being supported by his family. He later mentioned that he is an administrator in an online video game and receives 400 Euros monthly for the work he does in it. Game administrators are usually few in number, which makes his example hard to generalize, but the potential for online work for those with access might be worth investigating further.

5.4. Helpful Services Available for Students

Even though concerns regarding lack of access to information about opportunities are well documented in the literature (Watenpaugh et al., 2014), none of the participants reported any serious inconveniences due to lack of academic guidance prior to their entrance to the university. Almost all students mentioned that they were well supported by their previous education institutions if they went to high school in Turkey, or by the university after their application process.

5.4.1. Mentors

Students were asked to mention what sort of services they have access to on campus to aid their adaptation or work with them through complications, and the first example provided was mentors. By mentor, what is meant is the upperclassmen who are assigned to new students to help guide them through the adaptation process. Sayid mentioned that whenever he had issues, his mentor would be accessible and work with him to resolve the problem. Mentors were also very approachable in general.

5.4.2. Counseling and language support

Amira mentioned that within the student center of the university, there is a psychological counseling service dedicated to aiding students with their issues including adaptation. She also noted that language classes are provided for students who need it in the same area. Speaking of language support, Naim touched upon the need to have as much of it as possible, specifically pointing out that the current level of mandatory Turkish is not adequate and further classes should be not optional but required to succeed. Problems caused by inadequate Turkish knowledge will be covered in the following chapter.

5.4.3. Clubs

Finally, Latif discussed the existence of student clubs within the university. He pointed out that Syrian students use them often. According to Latif, some of the clubs are dedicated to specific activities like sports while others are purely about interaction and building community, giving the students opportunities to meet others and adapt more easily. Although, another student, Naim, did mention that some clubs are there but do not do anything. After signing up with them, there are no activities to attend.

Overall, the participants, in general, were not dissatisfied about the university services provided to help them with their adaptation. It should also be noted that, with the exception of language courses, which are taken advantage of by international students only, these services are not exclusive to Syrian students, but are accessible by all the students in the institution.

5.5. Interpersonal Relationships on Campus

5.5.1. Instructors

Students were asked to describe the nature of their interactions with others on campus, starting with their instructors. The responses were universally positive when it came to instructors. Sayid mentioned that teachers were good and easy to interact with. Anwar also shared his sentiment and added that when asked for an appointment, instructors made themselves available to them. Even when he came across them outside class, at the student center or the cafeteria, they were always approachable and easy to communicate with.

Latif and Khalid discussed an unusual point related to instructors. From their responses, it seemed like they have had a bit of a culture shock regarding how teachers are interacted with. Khalid provided the following example of typical instructor behavior from his past,

There [in Syria], it is very strict. One of my friends in the university forgot to say professor and said teacher instead. You know, since we were saying teacher before university, it is a common mistake in the first year. But the teacher was shouting at him and made him leave the class because of that. It is not even a mistake, just a small thing. They are very strict. Here I have never faced such a case.

Latif painted a similar picture, mentioning that it would be very difficult to speak to an instructor freely. Both Khalid and Latif found it hard to adapt initially to their Turkish instructors due to different hierarchical relationship than what they were familiar with in Syria, and this perception caused them to avoid interacting with their instructors in the beginning. This is similar to how international students react in the crisis stage of culture shock (Oberg, 1960).

5.5.2. Turkish students

Questions on the quality of Syrian students' interactions with Turkish students received mixed and seemingly conflicting responses at first, but after further inspection, a pattern seemed to emerge.

First of all, many participants reported positive interactions with Turkish students. Sayid shared that he has a lot of friends, Turkish and Syrian, most of whom are good people. Anwar also had a similar experience, where he would greet many students, some of whom he does not even know the names of, on his way to campus and on campus, and receive just as many greetings himself. He concluded by saying he has not experienced any discrimination and his relationships are good.

Latif had an interesting example where he mentioned working at a Ramadan tent with a lot of students. Eventually he ended up making many friends there. Ramadan tent ended up being a uniting factor that brought him and others together. It is a similar space to what Gee (2013) refers to as an "affinity space". According to Gee, affinity spaces are locations online or in real world where people gather together by choice because of a shared interest, where the affinity (or the interest) is what unites the group rather than their race, background, socioeconomic class or other similar factors. In that sense, one might consider Ramadan tent as such a space that provided Latif the opportunity to meet others through their shared interest.

On the flip side, there were numerous participants who felt distant to or even ignored by their peers. Hilmi, for example, mentioned that no one, including himself, really made any particular move to become friends, saying that Turkish people tend to stick together and that perhaps having a common language makes it easier for them. He did say that they were friendly when he interacted however. Harun, on the other hand, discussed a

common situation where he felt ignored in class by his peers, especially during group work activities. Latif echoed Harun's sentiment regarding in-class relationships. Although he made a lot of friends in the Ramadan tent, he had a hard time finding peers to work with during in-class group work activities.

The pattern is that, for Syrian students, the more academic the setting gets, the harder it becomes to interact with Turkish students. In many cases out of class, where the quality of interaction is casual, participants report having plenty of opportunities to interact with others. However, once the setting turns academic, or in other words in-class, the opportunities almost completely disappear. Latif and Harun both had the same theory on the matter, which is, in Latif's words "They usually prefer Turkish classmates because they speak Turkish easily, so they can finish their task quickly." Rather than taking the lack of interaction personal, they have attributed the distance to the complexity of the task and the lack of common language skills, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Overall, there is a negative correlation between how academic a setting is and how much interaction between Syrian and Turkish students takes place.

6. MAJOR CHALLENGES

This chapter focuses on the two main causes for serious concern throughout the participants' stay in Turkey, which are 1) the lack of a common language, and 2) commonly encountered discriminatory treatments. Every participant reported being affected by these two factors at one point or another, though at differing severities. In most cases, they are also still suffering from their effects.

6.1. Lack of Competence in a Common Language

6.1.1. Daily Interaction and Navigation Challenges

As Naim pointed out, the greatest challenge in Turkey, after being accepted into a university, is the language. This is supported by many researches from the literature pointing that a common language is seen as essential for both academic success and social and psychological well-being of international students (Zhou & Cole, 2017; Lehto et al., 2014; Sherry et al., 2010; Andrade, 2006), which clearly indicates that lack of a common language may deprive students of each of these. Apart from Anwar, who reported being proficient in Turkish previously thanks to his Turkmen mother, every participant reported running into complications due to the lack of a common language. English use was not widespread enough for them to use it either, even in places where one would expect English knowledge to be required, such as a bank or airport, according to some participants. For example, Sayid shared the story of his student card application as follows,

You can't live without Turkish language. It is so difficult because most people in Turkey don't use English and most of them, if you don't speak Turkish with them, get angry. They always speak louder [in Turkish], thinking that maybe you can understand them better when they do. I don't have a student card now because Halkbank [employees] just speak Turkish. They [workers at school] say go and do "hesap", I don't know what that is in English. After two months,

I came back and asked about my card, and they, at the students' office, told me that I should go to Halkbank after giving me a paper for Halkbank, saying I will get my card after one month. I still don't have my card.

Even simple procedures can turn complex, or even completely unmanageable, when explanations are non-existent or unclear, unfortunately. Sayid, in the quote, said that he still does not have his student ID, which means that a year has passed by now. To continue with the lack of English knowledge challenge, Hilmi talked about what he considers to be major shortcomings, discussing two different contexts in which he had encountered difficulties due to the lack of English knowledge,

Even at the airport. In 2016, when I came to Istanbul for the first time, I was in Atatürk Airport. The employee doesn't speak English, or he doesn't want, I don't know, but this is an international place. You have foreigners, you have tourists. Why you don't speak English? [...] The challenge is the language, because even if I am in an English university [English is the medium of education], they [staff] tend to speak Turkish more than English everywhere. Like, even the professors mostly when they come to their lecture for the first time, they ask "are there any foreigners here?". If there is no foreigner, they would speak in Turkish. It is an English University. Even if the students are all Turkish, you have to speak English. Turkish people or Turkish students who were enrolled in this university chose this university because it is in English.

Hilmi's statement about English not being spoken enough in relatively international environments such as the airport was echoed by many others; however, his thoughts on the medium of education and teachers using Turkish was not. Sayid, whose opinion was presented previously, had no complaints regarding the teachers' use of English, but instead found the workers' knowledge limited. There were other participants who shared that they have had no issues with instruction being in the appropriate language in class. The only other participant who reported Turkish use in class was in the Islamic Studies program, which is advertised as taught in Turkish, Arabic, and English, not exclusively English.

6.1.2. Lack of English Extracurricular Activities

One participant brought forth a unique concern related to the lack of a common language on campus. Though he was happy with the classes given in his program, Latif found it hard to push his studies and expand his knowledge further due to the language barrier. Here are his thoughts on the matter,

I am satisfied with my academic life here, but because my Turkish language is not good, I miss a lot of conferences, a lot of programs in Turkey. Most of them are in Turkish. Academic courses outside the university, or conferences in English for political science, I will be able to enter, but English ones are limited. I could attend one class in English, the only one; the rest were in Turkish. I want to attend a specific class, but it is in Turkish.

The classes and conferences he is referring to are from other departments or outside the university. His statement may be pointing to a need to expand the academic development opportunities offered in English for foreign students.

6.1.3. In-Class Group Work Challenges

The primary point of struggle, presented by the participants as being related to language and faced almost universally by the participants, was the difficulty of finding group work partners. Even when partners could be found, interaction in the group would be either minimal or non-existent. Here is Harun's example of what is considered typical grouping in class,

In order to work on a project, Turkish students generally prefer using Turkish. While studying or working on an assignment some place, they prefer to use Turkish. That's why we do not group together with Turks often. Because they will be using their own language. It is hard for us too. We are doing a project. It goes a lot faster when we speak our own language, we understand each other better. I mean, it is probably the same for Turkish students as well I guess. Until now I have never seen Turkish students working together to complete a project together with other foreigners. Even if I have, it must have been very rare.

Harun brought forth the ease of using the native tongue as the main reason for the separation in class. In class, where time to accomplish a task is limited, students seem to be preferring groupings that are more conducive to efficiency. Mehdi's experiences go in parallel to this idea as he explained the typical situation he would be in whenever he ended up in a group with other Turkish students,

They [students in the group] told me that I can stay away, and they can deal with everything because they prefer not to speak in English while they are doing their teamwork. So, in the beginning, I was isolated from my teammates. They left me behind. Then I got the credit of the whole work with them. But later on, when I understood the language [Turkish] more, I could join them. They started to give me easy tasks and, with time, we became better and better.

Mehdi's situation is not uncommon. Maya also reported being in groups where the students sharing a native tongue took over and completed the project. The differences in her case were that her group mates would occasionally summarize what they did to her, and, instead of trying to join the Turkish interaction like Mehdi, she would try to get at least one other international student to the group to force an English interaction. To further explore the reasons for homogeneous groupings being vastly more popular in class, Latif's accounting could also be considered,

Turkish classmates, they usually prefer Turkish classmates because they speak Turkish easily, so they can finish their task quickly. For foreigners, because they work in their second language more, they prefer to stay together. I think it is normal. If not, he [Turkish student] will not be able to speak English freely. He wants to speak with his first language. It is OK because it will be easy for him. Speaking English with a Turkish student would be kind of weird for them.

To add to the discussion, Latif brought forth the possibility that maybe speaking to others in English, even though there is a shared native language, feels artificial and might be another reason to explain why Turkish students were reverting to Turkish and forming exclusive groups.

Naim also has an interesting take on the situation, which he mentioned in his report,

It is definitely a bit difficult to work with Turkish students compared to the international students, since the main language is English between us. We have to do the essays and projects in English, so it is easier to have an idea in English and not have to translate it, but with my Turkish friends, when we have a group project, we do the brainstorming and everything in Turkish, and then translate it into English. That might cause a lot of idea loss. A lot of ideas got lost, I mean, in translations from one language to another. Sometimes you cannot have the same idea that you had in another language [meaning does not carry over as intended]. It is a bit difficult, but also good. In every group project, I prefer half of us to be international and the other half Turkish, because that will make you a good group. With the international students only, they may not have an idea about the situation in the country [Turkey], and if they are just Turkish students, then we will not have an idea about what is happening outside. So, having both of them will be good.

Naim seems to dislike the idea of exclusively Turkish groups from an education standpoint. He points out that grouping with Turkish students only and using Turkish to communicate within the group has the drawback of requiring a translation step before turning in assignments, considering the fact that the medium of education is English and

the final products, as he says, are supposed to be in English. He also stresses the importance of having a variety of backgrounds in the group to increase the amount of differing perspectives the group can draw upon to complete projects.

The value and demerits of homogenous groups, as well as the appropriateness of allowing or stopping the formation of such groups in class is beyond the scope of this paper and will not be further explored. However, it is important to note that none of the participants took these in-class groupings personal, or something directed towards Syrians specifically. In many cases, they considered it a matter of efficiency or familiarity. The validity of this conclusion becomes more apparent when participants' out-of-class interaction interpretations are concerned. Consider the following example given by Maya,

As a Syrian, they [Turkish students] don't all like us. It depends, but as an international, I feel some of them have a problem with internationals, like some Turks don't like international students. I don't know; I used to see that. Whenever we were standing, talking in English, they would be like, "Talk to her. She is talking English. I don't wanna talk to her." Something like that. They say it in Turkish, but we get it.

This is an interesting contradiction to the way interactions are interpreted in class. The situation Maya is talking about may just as well be interpreted as one Turkish student in the group having superior English proficiency and the other one pushing the responsibility of communication to the proficient one to save time or avoid misunderstandings. However, that is not how it is seen. The English interaction avoidance is taken as a sign of personal dislike. It may be worth exploring these perception differences in a further study to determine the exact causes of such differentiations.

Watenpaugh et al. (2014) attribute the language problems to the fact that the medium of instruction in many higher education institutions in Turkey is Turkish, which many Syrian students are not proficient at. While not directly applicable to the participants in the current study, as the medium of instruction there is English, it may still be relevant as English is still not being used enough to act as a common language. English being the medium of instruction also does not guarantee the use of English by the students during group work, as discussed earlier in this section.

One particularly important point to note is that, overall, language concerns are prominent mainly in academia. That is not to say that the participants had no issues communicating in non-academic contexts. In fact, many of them, especially older participants, suffered in a variety of ways due to their lack of Turkish proficiency. Activities such as finding a place to stay, securing employment, and even shopping became problematic (as reported by Anwar, Amira, Harun and Khalid). However, those issues were resolved relatively quickly, as Anwar points out, after learning rudimentary Turkish and the customs. The academic Turkish and English, however, kept being roadblocks to many participants, leading to a variety of issues to be discussed in the next chapter.

6.2. Discrimination

Before discussing the discrimination cases reported by the students, it is important to define the Turkish context on this matter. As mentioned in Chapter 3, a number of economic issues (increase of rent and housing costs, and the view that the Syrians give rise to job loss), have caused tensions between Turkish people and the Syrian refugees in Turkey (Kirişçi, 2014; İçduygu, 2015). Besides these issues, there are other reasons causing resentment among Turkish people towards Syrian refugees. For instance, on BBC Türkçe, Girit [05.07.2016], reports that the Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's statement that the Syrians in Turkey may be given Turkish citizenship sparked outrage among Turkish people. The opposition, as stated by Girit [05.07.2016], claims that the Syrians are seen as potential voters by the government and giving Turkish citizenship to them will strengthen Erdoğan's position. Girit [05.07.2016], also states that, after the statement of citizenship, hundreds of anti-Syrian posts were shared by Turkish people on the social media and includes one of these posts in her article,

They [Syrians in Turkey] run away from the war in their country, enter [Turkish] schools without taking an exam, don't do military service but in 10 years will be better off than I am. #Idontwantsyriansinmycountry

In fact, this social media post lists the main allegations against the Syrians in Turkey that have caused widespread tensions among Turkish people. Besides, Syrians are blamed for not fighting in their countries. In fact, there is a great deal of news in the media regarding the negativity directed towards the Syrians on this matter. An article published by

Evrensel newspaper (Sinan Oğan'dan Suriyeli düşmanlığı, [03.03.2017]) reports the statements of Sinan Oğan, a Turkish politician from MHP Party (Nationalist Action Party),

...In Turkey, there are at least one million Syrians capable of fighting. Turkish soldiers are dying in Al-Bab, and the Syrians are smoking hookah here and there and harassing women on the streets. This is unacceptable.

Furthermore, on January 2018, Turkish armed forces launched Turkish Operation Olive Branch and, within the scope of this cross-border military operation, started to fight with the terrorist organizations in Syria (Zeytin Dalı Harekatı Bir Yaşında, [20.01.2019]). This interference increased the tensions among Turkish people even further. Hakan [08.02.2018], a journalist from Hürriyet newspaper states in one of his articles that he is not against Syrian refugees, especially women, children and the elderly, but while the Turkish soldiers are losing their lives defending Syria, the Syrians who are capable of fighting enjoy themselves in the cities of Turkey, which makes his “blood boil”.

Clearly, media is a powerful platform where anyone or any organizations can share their opinions. Thus, the impact of any kind of propaganda is amplified. There are, in fact, quite a lot of provoking posts, and news articles on the media against the Syrian refugees in Turkey. Mülteciler (Refugees) Association published an article (Suriyelilerle ilgili doğru bilinen yanlışlar, [28.06.2019]) on its website debunking a number of fallacies that provoke Turkish people, among which are “Syrians do not have to wait in line in the hospitals”, “Syrians do not pay water, electric and heating bills”, “The government is providing Syrian students with 1200 TL scholarship”, etc. It is stated in the article,

Almost every single day, there are news about Syrians on the social media, on TV and in the newspapers. Most of the news on the social media is far from accurate and has a racist language. Inaccurate news on the social media is misleading people and disturbing the public peace... (Mülteciler Derneği, 2019)

There is even a website named “Suriyeliler Suriye’ye.com” (<http://suriyelilersuriyeye.com/>), which translates as “Syrians back to Syria.com”, regularly sharing posts against Syrian refugees.

The provoking news and posts on the media cause Syrians to become targets of lynch attempts on the streets too, and their properties are vandalized. For instance, according to

Habertürk, about twenty Syrian houses and shops in Turkish city Konya were attacked by a crowded group armed with stones and sticks, and a Syrian got injured during the attacks (Konya'da Suriyelilere Saldırı, [04.11.2017]). Similarly, in Esenyurt district of Istanbul, Syrians were attacked by local residents after a dispute over noise, and Syrians' houses and cars were damaged, four people got injured and during the lynch attempt, a crowded group marched on the streets shouting "This is Turkey" (Esenyurt'ta Suriyelilere toplu saldırı: 4 yaralı, [10.02.2019]).

To put it briefly, the Syrian refugees in Turkey is a controversial and a politicized matter, and there are quite a lot of reactions among Turkish people against Syrian refugees. From the common people to the politicians and journalists, this anti-Syrian sentiment is shared by many in the Turkish society. The rest of this section will be based on the experiences of the participants of the study and how they personally see the matter.

6.2.1. Negative Preconceptions of the Natives

Discrimination was reported as one of the most pervasive challenges faced by the participants, and the main cause for those challenges were repeatedly pointed out as the initial misconceptions of the Turkish population. According to the students participating in the study, a great deal of misunderstandings exist regarding both the displaced Syrians' circumstances in Turkey, and the typical culture and living conditions (before the war) in Syria. Naim briefly summarized the common misconceptions in the following quote, along with giving an example of prejudiced behavior,

The students don't usually accept you as a Syrian because they have some kind of stereotypes about Syrians. They are illiterate. They are even terrorists. They are poor. They don't have money. They are not smart enough and such. I met a lot of prejudiced students. I met someone on campus. We were supposed to go to a café and eat together. We went there and, you know, after everything, you are gonna pay for yourself. I was about to go pay for myself, but then he said, "You came from Syria. You even need one lira... You are poor." At the end of the day, I paid for me and for him just to make him quiet.

Naim's personal example presents a more benevolent form of preconception here that one may even mistakenly consider as a positive. However, such a misconception, if not corrected, could permanently leave one labeled as poor and cause complications in a

variety of situations. For example, the short shopping story provided by Lely illustrates the point,

One time I was in Kadıköy [with her sister], and a worker was following us. She was afraid that we would take something or steal something because she heard us talking in Arabic. So, she followed us everywhere until we left the store.

Having a negative label such as “poor” naturally heightens the amount of surveillance one is under. Even though Lely had never mentioned lacking access to resources, she was assumed to be so by the worker in the store due to an assumed background. Though it has to be highlighted that this is how Lely interprets the situation. There are stores where the shop assistants follow the customers around or keep a close eye on them, regardless of their identity.

According to the participants, being considered poor had one more rather major negative consequence. A number of students reported that they had a hard time finding a place to live due to cases similar to the following provided by Hilmi,

We are not like other foreigners, or Turkish people don't see Syrian people as other foreigners. For example, I wanted to rent a flat. I called him [homeowner] by phone and told him that I saw the advertisement and I want to rent your flat. And he said OK. [He asked] “How old are you? What are you studying? Are you alone or do you live with your family? Ok, you can come tomorrow to see the flat.” I said ok. Finally, he said, “By the way, what's your nationality?”, and when I said I am Syrian, he said, “No, I am sorry, don't come tomorrow.”

It was a difficult circumstance to face, especially considering the fact that Hilmi was approved and everything was fine until Syrian background was revealed. This is not a unique case, either. The example given by Yara echoes Hilmi's statement, but this time it is the neighbors that were not satisfied by the students' backgrounds,

We were looking for a house near the university, and we found one in Gülsuyu. It was good, near the metro and the bus station. It was really good, and we wanted to rent that house, but the neighbor of that house came into the house that we are looking at. At first, he didn't say anything. He didn't know we are Syrian, so he was kind. He was smiling. And then when he learned that we are Syrian, he just became so aggressive, and said “No, I won't let my neighbors be Syrian. I don't want any Syrian people in my building.” So, we just left the house. We didn't say anything because it was a really bad situation.

Even when the homeowner approves of the situation, it appears that neighbors could take it upon themselves to deny new tenants' access. It would, however, not be a stretch to say that the origin of such behavior might be based on rumors anchored in reality. As one student, Naim, pointed out in the following story, prejudice confirming behavior did exist,

It is good to be here.... now the people are coming together. They are not mean to each other anymore... I mean even the Syrians when they came here, they weren't so kind to the Turkish, to be honest. It is not just one way. It is two-ways around. Some Syrian people rented a house and lived there for a year and not paid for the last 6 months and just run away. I am not denying it. But now people are having a better understanding about each other. The Syrians, when they first came here, they had a high level of stress because everything was new. They didn't want to come here, but they were forced to. They had a lot of stress and they didn't feel welcomed in the beginning. But now everything is fine.

It is worth noting that, as Naim points out in his accounting, these cases were from the Syrians' initial entry to Turkey, which was a time of great fear and stress. Generalization of such cases to the entirety of the Syrian population, especially years after their occurrence is not something that the participants are happy about. Anwar discusses the issue in the following quote,

The idea is, whether it is a Syrian or a Turkish person that discriminates or makes a mistake, humans, the uneducated people will generalize things. If he [a Syrian] sees a Turkish person discriminate others, maybe he will say all the Turkish people do this. Or if a Turkish person sees a Syrian make a mistake, he will say "oh all the Syrians do this." This is a problem. Don't generalize things. It is an individual person who did it. It is his problem [fault]. This [generalizations] makes [creates] a big gap between Turkish people and Syrian people. [...] You know, we have this disease called social media. Someone can just post something and put a hashtag on it, and people who don't follow the real things will accept this and repost this hashtag. It is gonna be out of nothing.

The point Anwar is making here was also brought forth by Burhan (23), one of the male participants of the focus group. People are, in general, too quick to generalize and strongly believe the information they have read online even without coming across any confirming examples. Gee (2013) discusses this matter extensively, pointing out that humans use their experiences to quickly form generalizations, which is a situation that comes with a caveat. According to Gee, people have difficulty distinguishing what is heard through the media and what was actually experienced, due to the way human

memory works. When recalling an experience, it is naturally difficult to recall where exactly it was received, since “we tend to meld all our experiences together, both first- and secondhand experiences, as well as making associations and finding patterns based on it” (part 1, chapter 6, para. 22). This behavior makes it possible to manipulate what is fact and what is not through the use of social media, due to posts like the ones Anwar mentioned.

6.2.2. Lack of Knowledge about Syria and Syrians’ Situation

Another factor that contributes to the increase of discrimination towards Syrians, according to the participants, is the lack of general knowledge about Syria as well as the policies regarding Syrians implemented by the Turkish government. To start with, it seems like very little is known about Syria in Turkey, as can be noted in the following comment shared by Naim,

We were sitting in the class. It was raining. He [a Turkish classmate] said, “Does it rain in Syria?” Of course, it rains in Syria. Then he said, “Do you have cars or camels for transportation?” I said no, we do have cars. We still eat fries and have Lamborghinis. We are still a country. Then he said, “Do you have fruit, or do you eat from the trees?” Of course, we have fruit.

Amira also mentioned that a classmate also asked her similar questions, like “Are there hospitals in Syria?” which she found baffling. Maya was likewise surprised when she was asked whether they had credit cards in Syria. Over all, the assumption seems to be that Syria is a desert with little to offer its people. One might wonder what the harm of these mistaken beliefs could be. However, expecting the citizens of a presumably undeveloped country to be uneducated and uncivilized would not completely unreasonable, and can lead to those citizens, in this case Syrians, being underestimated and undervalued.

A more pressing concern, however, is the belief that every single Syrian is currently being supported by the Turkish government. Participants regularly stressed that such a support does not exist. Anwar talks about the situation in the following excerpt,

There is a misunderstanding about this situation exactly. There is a lot of dialogue about it. I was in shock when I heard that we [Syrians] get 1200 TL monthly from the government. It was like propaganda against Syrians... You can research the economy of Turkey. You will see what the Syrians did for the Turkish people. It is exactly the opposite. They didn’t get, they gave. You can

see a lot of investments by Syrians nowadays. The main idea is that the Syrians surely help the Turkish economy. It is not something small.

Anwar's opinions are based on facts. According to Erdoğan (2014), not only did the unemployment numbers across Turkey decreased, but also, thanks to the new investments by Syrians, existing markets expanded, creating further job opportunities.

In any case, Anwar's sentiment regarding aid is commonly shared among the participants. They have on numerous occasions pointed out that they are not receiving government aid, especially while answering interview questions in the previous chapter regarding funding. To expand on the subject, Amira provided further information regarding financial aid in the following comment,

“Government [Turkish] is looking after you” they say. Government is not looking after us. Government is not giving us anything. Alright, the government [officials] show up on television and say they do, but to whom? To the people [Syrians] in the camps, because, first of all, those people have arrived without a passport. Secondly, the government has to take care of them. Why? Because it is receiving money from Europe based on the number of Syrians in Turkey. That money is not given to other Syrians [ones not in camps]. The Syrians living in camps have to get that. Because what work can they do at camps? What is even available to them? But just because they are receiving money does not mean that every Syrian is receiving money.

Amira was really passionate during her explanation. Having to face accusations like receiving aid from Turkish government or entering university all thanks to the government led her to look into the matter, the findings of which she shared in her comment. “The Syrians living in camps” refers to the 12% of all the Syrians living in Turkey, who are considered to have no access to resources, according to Unicefturk (2018), leaving them devoid of the basic needs. This seems to be another case of overgeneralization, caused by social media as Anwar pointed out. Participants reported facing similar generalizations in every context, though at varying degrees depending on location. The effect of time and place on the amount of discrimination faced will be explored further later in this chapter.

6.2.3. Long Work Hours with Little Pay

One concern that the Syrians are currently suffering from is being seen as cheap workers. Similar to the earlier discussed expectations like Syrians not paying for their homes, this

assumption is also based on the earlier years of war when Syrians first came to Turkey. Harun, in the following story, mentioned the mindset at the time as well as his working conditions,

Syrians were coming here and to work is a must. Because they don't have a home, they need to pay rent to live there. I mean the main purpose at the time was to get out of tents and start living in a house. Of course, to live in a house, they had to work. If you don't work for one day in Turkey, you end up a beggar. That is how it was. We had to work but we also could not work everywhere. The employers, how could they select us and give us jobs? Most of them only picked Syrians because they expected less pay. I started working at a restaurant first at the age of 16. Work would start at 6 in the morning and end at 9 at night. It was just too much pressure. Especially in the food related work, there are no breaks. Only one day per 15. After that, I moved to textile. The pay is even less but at least there is a half-day break on Saturday, and Sundays are free.

Overall, the only way to leave the refugee camps for some Syrian refugees was to find a job, and considering that many were of young age and lacked experience, or in the experienced ones' case lacked documentation to prove experience, they had no choice but to accept whatever conditions employers offered. Kirişçi (2014) has explored this matter previously and the accounting of the participants aligns with his report of Syrians being exploited under poor work conditions. Unfortunately, the conditions offered were rarely on par with even minimum wage Turkish workers. Naim's comments below illustrates the point,

The firms started to employ the Syrians instead of Turkish because Syrians get paid less than the minimum wage. I was 15 when I was looking for work. I was working for 18 hours a day. It was in textile. You know, the clothes come, and you work on them and put them through the machine. We were doing the same thing for 18 hours. It was me and three of my cousins working on the same machine. We were like waking up at 8 and start working right away until 12 at midnight. Then we sleep and then we work again the next day. The treatment wasn't the greatest because you are a factory worker. You just do the same job like a robot, so they [managers] were like "hurry up, hurry up" even if you are sick or have a headache...even if your stomach hurts or you don't feel emotionally right. For example, someone passed away one day. They didn't care and just said "work harder." They cared about the output, not what your situation is. It was difficult, but you get through.

As mentioned by Orhan and Gündoğar (2015), the child labor issue is a challenge Turkey has yet to overcome, unfortunately. The work conditions, from the stories of these participants, sound extremely challenging and Syrians' need to find employment to

survive might be taken advantage of in cases like Naim's. However, it is important to note that these may not be work conditions exclusive to Syrians. Turkish workers in the textile industry may be suffering from similar treatment. Investigation of the working conditions in textile industry falls beyond the scope of this study but may be needed in the future for further clarification.

6.2.4. Is Discrimination Proportional to the Development Level of a Location?

One interesting finding was that some participants reported facing far less discrimination overall and had an easier time approaching Turkish citizens around their university and in more developed districts of Istanbul. Naim provided his experience in the following paragraph,

In Esenler, the neighborhoods were very problematic...In Esenler, they were kinda racist. They would say things like "what are you doing here? Go to your country" ...and again, they would mention the poor thing. "You Syrians came here, now we have no jobs to work" and so on and so forth. But here [Maltepe] is quite nice. The neighbors were helpful. They would give us presents and food. We would exchange some kind of dishes [cooking for each other] and stuff. They would visit us, and we would visit them. They don't treat us very differently.

It is interesting to see how the behavior of the locals shifts so completely depending on the location participants live in. Even when it comes to something like making friends. Hanassab (2006) also discusses a similar finding, where the amount of discrimination received by the participants increase as they get further away from the campus. To illustrate the point further, Latif shared his opinion on the matter along with one of his conversations with a classmate as follows,

Some of them [Turkish citizens] welcome us to stay here [in Turkey], but some of them, due to some economic situation, they are like "I don't need more workers in my country. Don't be a competition to me." Most of the Syrians work for low wages here, so there is kind of a competition here with other workers. I told my friends [on campus dorm] that I have a Turkish friend outside. They told me "oh ok... It is easy to make a Turkish friend." No, it is not easy! Come and see Fatih, Avcılar, Beylikdüzü or Yenibosna, and see how they treat us. They have different views [about Syrians] because we are competition, so it is different. Syrian students here in the university are in a different situation and they have lots of Turkish friends.

Latif makes the point that the main reason why Syrians are not liked is due to the fact that in locations where blue-collar workers live, Syrians are seen as direct competition and a major cause of a deterioration in their working conditions. Such a conflict seems non-existent or is far less prevalent in other locations, making it easier for the participants to fit in and mingle with the locals.

One final differentiation between locations and treatment occurs at an institution level where the type of university students attend to, such as public or private, influences their treatment greatly. Mehdi had the following to say on the subject,

For me, personally no [have not felt any discrimination on campus], but I heard people speaking about discrimination faced by Arabs and Syrians especially. Maybe they [other students] don't know that I am Syrian. Even when they know, they say "You are our friend. You are different from other Syrians that we are talking about." The Syrians in public universities in Turkey face discrimination far more. Syrian students are seen like parasites, or something similar, taking resources from Turkish people.

Mehdi did not elaborate further but from what he shared, it is clear that his experience in the foundation university is very different than the experience his friends receive at public institutions. Of course, without exploring the circumstances in public institutions directly, it is hard to discuss the matter further.

6.2.5. Discrimination Decreased Over Time

Similar to the fluctuations caused by location, the passing of time was also a major factor for many participants in terms of how much discrimination they had encountered. Following comment by Anwar discussed the issue,

You can see this in Syrian neighborhoods, especially in Fatih. The relations between them [Turkish people and Syrians] are very cool. They got used to each other. They buy from each other. The Syrian bread is different than the Turkish. I saw a lot of Turkish people going there [to a Syrian bakery] because they like it. They buy from that bread and some sweets also. Turkish people like sweets, so they try Syrian sweets too. There are good things.

It seems like the more time people spent around one another, the more they interacted and learned each other's culture. Slowly acceptance started to overtake rejection. This is not a universally shared behavior of course. For example, those who saw Syrians as competition, as described in the previous section, still display hostile behavior. However,

in cases where such rivalry does not exist, the situation seems to be improving. Latif, for example, who had worked with Red Crescent before, shared his story of how his neighbor who constantly shouted at him as he passed by stopped doing so and even began asking him for medical opinion and assistance occasionally.

6.2.6. Discrimination Imagined?

Interestingly, two cases were reported by the participants where the act of discrimination shared by them may not be related to them specifically. The first case was provided by Sayid as follows,

When I came to Turkey, I had a problem. I wanted to connect internet. I went to some company for internet, but they said, “We don’t connect internet for Syrian people.” Just because I am Syrian. They said “Syrian”. Another one said, “We don’t connect internet for international people.”

Initially, this may seem like discriminatory behavior towards Syrians; however, the final portion of the accounting muddles the case. This may have been a policy related problem where anyone who is not Turkish is ineligible for access until certain conditions are met. Anwar, in the following quote, pointed out another case which he initially assumed to be discriminatory but then reconsidered,

I felt discrimination sometimes from governmental buildings. When you go to a governmental building, for example the hospitals, there are very long waiting times. You keep waiting. But I think maybe it isn’t just for me, but also for Turkish people too. Maybe I faced that in governmental buildings because there are just a lot of people there. Governmental buildings, a lot of people are there always. That’s why, maybe it’s a misunderstanding.

Anwar here is discussing the unfortunate circumstance of having to wait in long lines sometimes to get work done in governmental buildings. From his accounting, as a newcomer to the country at the time, he may have assumed it is a treatment specific to Syrians, while Turks also share the same fate.

It should be noted that even when the truth is eventually realized, cases such as these, where discrimination is thought to exist even if it may actually not, still impact student perceptions and behavior. As reported by Berry and Sabatier (2010), students may become unwilling to interact both at psychological and social level with the host culture.

6.2.7. Solidarity Expectation of Syrians

One participant reported an unusual case where she got into an argument with another Syrian over how she should behave in Turkey. Consider the following story by Amira,

Once I was in the metro. Around the time my Turkish was pretty good. I ran into a Kurdish woman, at least I thought she was Kurdish. I have a Kurdish friend who is bad at Turkish, so I thought she was like that. She said that she is going to Yenikapı or Aksaray or something like that. I had a class in Aksaray, so I said I'm headed in the same direction. She said alright, but her Turkish was very limited. It was probably her first time in the metro and she was holding onto me, I guess to not get lost. I was pretty uncomfortable to be honest. So, we came to Aksaray. When we got there, she said drop me off at my son's. I was going to class, so I told her I could not do that. Then she said she has his number and asked me to call him. I said ok but did not give her the phone. Instead I held it up for her to speak. Of course, I would not trust someone I do not know with it. Then I noticed her speaking in Arabic. Turns out that she was Syrian. I began speaking in Arabic as well. That's when she began to shout at me. "You are from my country, but you are acting like a Turk!" I was speaking to her in Turkish at first. How would I know that she's Syrian? She kept shouting, "You are Syrian! What kind of a person are you?! If you don't help your own people, what good are you?" I said I didn't know about her origin and she replied, "You are speaking in Turkish to hide yourself!" Either way, she told me to take her to her son. Again, I said I could not because I have classes to get to and I could only get her here. She began shouting so much that people started gathering around us. They will think "look, the Syrians are fighting each other." We are both Syrians, but we can of course fight. Just because both of us are Syrians does not mean I would trust her. I can also trust a Turkish citizen, for example. So that's something I experienced related to Syrians.

This is an example of one of the more complex choices Syrians, and in fact everyone who lives in a society, have to make. In this case, Amira was called to honor a perceived duty to aid those that are of a similar origin as her. However, she also had to honor her own role as a student and continue her education that may in turn elevate Syrians as a whole, which is a point Amira and five other participants have also made. According to Gee (2013), the cause for this conflict may lie in the cultural forces referred to as status and solidarity. In Gee's words, "On the one hand, we want status and respect for ourselves and we also want to offer status and respect to those we admire or fear in some fashion. On the other hand, we want solidarity with others, a sense of bonding and belonging with people we think or hope are 'like us' and will count us as 'one of them'" (part 1, Chapter 7, para. 6). Looking at Amira's situation through the lens of status and solidarity, the

origin of the conflict becomes clearer. The woman she met in the metro wanted Amira to place solidarity first and come to the assistance of those within her solidarity reference group, disregarding, or considering minute, the impact it may have on Amira's education and reputation as a student. Amira, on the other hand, placed her student identity, her status reference group, first in her priorities for numerous reasons, including using it to assist Syria in the future.

7. IMPACT OF THE CHALLENGES

7.1. Complications Caused by the Lack of a Common Language

7.1.1. Isolation

The previously discussed challenges, when exposed to for an extended amount of time, ended up causing a variety of problems for the participants, the first of which is the feeling of isolation. Mainly presented as problematic by the younger students, not being able to communicate left some participants unable to socialize. Amira, for example, briefly explained her situation in the following,

When we came here [Turkey], I was in the last grade of high school. We could not go to school. My father would not let us leave the house because we could not speak Turkish. With my sibling, we would go to the market close by and learn Turkish. There was a market right across from our home. We would ask the worker there, “What is this? What is that?” and learned Turkish like that. But we were at home all the time.

Not knowing how to interact ended up isolating the participants from the community, though it can be seen that as they began learning Turkish words useful for shopping, Amira and her sibling were allowed to go to the market. In a way, language became a barrier for them that needed to be crossed to gain access to different locations. Sayid shared a similar isolation story where he could not interact with others and ended up staying in the dorm most of the time and feeling alone due to the lack of social interaction. This finding is in line with the literature, discussed by Weiss, where international students reportedly suffer from loneliness due to being deprived of social interactions (as cited in Terrell-Deutsch, 1999).

7.1.2. Inability to Fulfill the Requirements of Being a Student

Not having a common language also ended up making it difficult for the participants to keep up with certain bureaucratic requirements and led to unnecessary difficulties.

Sayid's story of how he could not get his student identification card because of communication problems he shared in the previous chapter caused him to not have proper identification for entry to campus. In his interview, Sayid reported frequent problems with the school security every time he tries to enter the campus.

7.1.3. Missing Self-Improvement Opportunities

Although the medium of education is English in most of the programs, and the majority of the teachers reportedly adhere to that, the language used in conferences and programs outside the campus are still vastly in Turkish, which makes it difficult to participate. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Latif brought this concern forth as a constant challenge that he faces as most of the conferences in his field of political sciences are given in Turkish, and, due to the complicated nature of the academic language used, he is unable to participate. Therefore, lack of a common language in this regard causes them to miss self-improvement opportunities.

7.1.4. Inability to Keep Up in Class

Perhaps the most serious impact of the language concerns is felt in the class. Amira, whose major is Islamic Studies, a program that has Arabic and Turkish classes in addition to English, reported her in-class experience in the following excerpt,

I know how to speak but academic Turkish is completely different. From time to time, I have trouble understanding the teachers. Sometimes, during examinations for example, it gets truly hard. The Turkish and English courses especially. Sometimes I cannot take not understanding the classes and end up crying. Once I read an entire book in its original Arabic, but I could not contribute at all in class because they [teacher and classmates] have read it in Turkish and are discussing it using Turkish terms. Since they do not always have equivalents in Arabic, it felt like I have not read anything. After spending so much effort, it felt terrible. Of course, teachers help when I ask for assistance but sometimes I feel hesitant because I'm interrupting the teacher. He is explaining something. When I say, "Teacher, what does this word mean", he begins explaining and it [class] gets interrupted. That's why I withdraw myself. Even though teachers say "Ask, ask", I feel hesitant.

It is an interesting phenomenon where students face a serious complication in class due to language but are hesitant to ask for aid to overcome it. Initially, one might attribute such avoidance to Amira's Syrian background and possibly the need to avoid drawing

attention to herself. However, considering her reasoning for not asking for aid, this case may be better explained as part of an education and classroom practices focused study.

7.1.5. Inability to Participate in Group Work

Another negative in-class effect of a lack of common language is the limitations encountered during practice activities. As mentioned in the previous chapter, student groupings were mostly homogeneous, with Turkish students in groups of their own. In the cases where a participant ended up in these groups, participants felt helpless. Mehdi, for example, shared that until he got more proficient in Turkish to be able to participate, he was isolated from his teammates and they frequently left him behind. Maya shared a similar opinion. Though sometimes her group partners would summarize what they did, in most cases “They would do everything and won’t tell me [Maya].” Due to this behavior, in her words, she “won’t get anything from the project.” Naim went through a similar experience and shared that he would not be able to get enough help from others. Interestingly, Naim also provided his own solution to this issue in the following comment,

It is compulsory for us to take two levels of Turkish language and you have to take them during the first year. That helped me a lot because if you don’t know any Turkish, you can come to university twice a week, for four hours, and learn the language. For the foreign students, I think it is good that the curriculum forces us [to take Turkish lessons]. Eventually, you will have an idea on what the students are talking in Turkish and you will have a better understanding of their language. You can even slowly start speaking and have some Turkish friends. You can communicate with them too, and you will be, basically, good at understanding what the Turkish students say.

Naim went on to explain that it may even be necessary to add a third level of Turkish as a compulsory language class due to how complex academic Turkish can get, pointing out that two levels are not adequate to cover everything. His concern is echoed in the literature by Hohberger (2018) as well, where it is suggested that the Turkish language classes offered to the students do not cover academic language and prepare students adequately for the in-class language encountered daily. Naim’s suggestion may be worth considering for the future.

7.1.6. Inability to Work in the Field of Expertise

As pointed out by one participant, language barrier also had the effect of keeping some Syrians from taking advantage of their previous work experiences. Harun had the following to say,

For example, my older brother worked as a hairdresser in Syria. Here in Turkey, he is working in textile right now. My father was a restaurant manager over there [Syria], but he is also working in textile in Turkey. Syrians are all turning to textile because it is where talking is the least wanted thing.

Though there may be other reasons for turning to textile, such as lacking documentation to prove past work experience, Harun's definition of the situation suggests that this case originates from a deficiency in language knowledge instead.

7.2. Complications Caused by Discrimination

7.2.1. Masking Identity and Identity Crisis

When faced with discriminatory treatments, typical behavior exhibited by the participants was one of avoidance rather than direct confrontation. The first method used for that is the masking of identity. Mehdi's following comment refers to this matter,

I think there is a discrimination. For me when a Turkish person asks me "where are you from?", I don't say I am Syrian. I give an answer around it. I say something like I came from Saudi Arabia. I am not telling him I am Syrian. That's how I avoid conflict in my daily life.

One might think taking such measures are unnecessary, but from what another participant pointed out, it may be warranted to receive assistance in some cases or avoid questioning. Consider Sayid's statement below,

Sometimes, when people ask me "where are you from?", I don't say Syria. If I say Syria, I say, "but I come from Saudi Arabia". I feel bad. I come from Syria. It should not be a problem. Why should I be scared? But when you say, "I am Syrian", people just walk and don't want to help you. [...] Most foreign people tell me that Turkish people are helpful, and I found it to be true for most of them. But they [other foreigners] told me "you shouldn't say you are Syrian." That too I found true. Because when I say I am Syrian, people look at me like "why are you here?"

The preferential treatment depending on the country of origin was a common occurrence in the participants' reports. Souzan, for example, reported that she received better

treatment when she said she is from Dubai or Turkey. If her language skills were questioned, she would say that she had lived abroad for a long time.

The desire to mask identity on occasion went beyond just verbal communication and influenced the appearance of one participant. Here is Maya's story of the measures she had taken to appear different,

I changed the way I wear my hijab. You know, Syrians have a special way [of wearing it]. Actually, I changed it a bit. It is parted in the middle now. This is not [neither] Turkish, not [nor] Syrian at the same time. This way they [Turkish people] won't look at me like I am Syrian. They used to do that, so that's why I changed my hijab...so people would think that I am Turkish now. The looks of people...they look at us and they don't talk with us sometimes. When I was in my first year, I didn't know Turkish at all and I looked Syrian so much. An old guy on the street just stopped and he started talking about Syrians a lot. He was bad obviously.

Though it may not be ideal, such behavior seems to have aided participants in navigating daily conversations, receiving aid on occasions where it might be denied, and even avoiding potential trouble.

Apart from the desire to hide identity for convenience, some participants also reported feeling detached from their Syrian origin for a variety of reasons. For example, Jamil had the following to say,

When I came here, I felt like I was used to the culture and people. After I lived here, I felt like I am Turkish more than Syrian. I don't have a lot of memories of Syria. That's why, I don't even want to think that I am Syrian. That's why, I think I will be alright if I won't feel I am Syrian. If I remember that I am Syrian and keep thinking it, I will live in a terrifying situation [remember the conflict]. I want to forget everything about Syria. [...] Most of the time, I don't like to hang out with Syrians because I want to forget everything about Syria. I am trying to get used to communicating with foreigners. Most of the time, our [Syrians'] conversation is about the revolution and the situation in Syria and I don't want to talk about the war. I want to forget about it, so I prefer not to hang out with them.

Jamil was 15 when he arrived in Turkey and, from his accounting, it seems like his Syrian identity is tightly linked with war and all the negativity associated with it. After having lived in Turkey for the past 5 years, his words suggest that he feels more comfortable considering himself Turkish. Other participants, like Khalid, who had lived in Turkey for

an extended period of time and received citizenship, also suggested the emergence of a Turkish identity in them that is pushing its way into the foreground.

7.2.2. Self-Isolation and Avoidance

On a similar note to masking identity, some participants tried to cope with the challenges they have faced through isolating themselves by choice and avoiding interaction in the first place. For example, Latif shared a story of how he and his friends began to behave in public in the following story,

Some people [Syrians] stop speaking in Arabic because they are afraid of how people [Turkish] look at them in some places. They say, “Oh look, Arabic...” Now they [his friends] don’t speak Arabic on the bus. They prefer to use Arabic when they leave the bus or metro to have a conversation. You get that look, so you won’t prefer [to speak Arabic], and you just stay [silent] all the way. Because [otherwise] you will stay on the metrobus for 20 minutes and the people will look at you. So, I stop [using Arabic] or lower my voice so they won’t understand me.

In order to avoid drawing attention, they began to refrain from using Arabic. This situation is not unwarranted, according to Amira, who shared the following story of how Arabic got her and her sister into trouble one day,

Once my sister and I were walking down the street, naturally speaking in Arabic. My sister accidentally bumped into an older lady. She [Amira’s sister] apologized and turned back to continue walking with me. That is when the lady heard us speaking in Arabic. She began shouting so much. At that time apparently, Turkish soldiers had entered Syria, crossed the border, and some things were happening there. There were even many deaths I think. She began shouting our soldiers are dying there but you are having fun here. Back then, I ended up crying. I could not respond at all. [...] I wish I could talk to her now. She was covered and had a long overcoat and everything. I want to say, “What are you talking about?”

From her story, it sounds like the revelation of Amira and her sister’s identity as Syrians led the woman in the story to use them as an outlet for her frustration towards another matter they had no personal control over. Hence, similar to the reactions in the media discussed previously, Amira and her sister were held responsible for the deaths of Turkish soldiers in Syria. To take avoidance a step further, Rima (20) and Sayid also mentioned that they occasionally completely avoid interaction if it seems like trouble might be the result. Rima reported that she does not face discrimination because if it looks like

someone might be against Syrians, she does not approach them. Sayid, on the other hand, stated that he would “always put headphones on and move” so people leave him alone.

These findings align with McCormack’s (1998) accounting, where students lacking common language skills felt more discrimination and preferred self-isolation more. Though the main difference between that study and the current one is that rather than not knowing the language causing issues, in some cases, knowing the “wrong” language drew attention.

7.2.3. Stress

Stress in general does not just affect Syrian students, as it is experienced by everyone to one degree or another due to a variety of causes. However, the cases leading to stress to be described in this section are far more specific to Syrian students and to displaced people.

Not knowing how to approach people, for example, is a commonly encountered stressor for the participants, and for reasons quite unique to them. Consider the following statement by Essam (22), from the focus group,

One thing bothers me a lot. I mean both sides [Turkish and Syrians], we have made mistakes, let’s agree on that. But, one thing bothers me a lot from Turkish side is, I mean because of some people and not everyone, they think that Syrians, for example, come here and Turks don’t know what to do with them [how to evaluate them]. If you are studying, they [Turks] say “They [Syrians] are taking our seats in the universities,” or wherever you are. If you don’t study, they say, “He is ignorant”. If you work, they say, “He took our place in the working field”. If you don’t work, they say, “He is poor”. I mean, whatever you do, they criticize. I am not talking about all Turkish people, but in some cases, you don’t know how to deal with them.

Another student, Burhan, shared a very similar sentiment. This time, however, instead of being criticized on what the Syrians are doing in Turkey, he was criticized on his future plans,

I shared where I am from and that I am a student. They [Turkish people] asked, “After you graduate, will you go back to Syria or stay here?” At first, I said “I will stay here,” but then I saw that they got angry. They don’t like that because they are thinking that there are too many Syrians and if they stay it will be too much for their country. So they say “you should go there [Syria]. It is your country.” Then I understood that I should say I will go back. Even if I won’t, I should say that. So then, there was a man speaking with me. I told him “of

course, I will go back.” But he said, “Shame on you. You studied here. You should benefit the country. You should be here.” I just said I would go back because people wanted to hear that before. But now, he is saying, “Don’t you like this country?” So, I don’t know how to deal with this issue.

Given the reactions of the Turkish people, it is conceivable that Syrians feel unwanted in Turkey, but the last part of Burhan’s story where he points out the contradictions in responses seems like a byproduct of what students referred to as the varied nature of the Turkish people, discussed earlier in the “Diversity is everywhere” section of this paper. These students had no idea how to respond in a way that would keep them from coming into conflict. As a result, they were reportedly feeling more stressed.

Another cause for major stress for some participants was their worries of the future. Again, to some extent, everyone feels concern for their futures. However, in the case of one Syrian student, the effect was multiplied due to not having much to fall back on. Sayid shared, in his accounting of the early university days, that whenever he could not understand the language or had issues with grammar in class, he would feel scared. He said he would begin thinking about the future and wonder, “Where can I go?” and “What should I do?” without finding an answer. He even reported that he lost a great deal of weight (13 kilos) in the first month of classes because he did not feel like eating anything due to stress of this situation.

One more, and perhaps one of the most exclusive, cause for stress for displaced people is the post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which a number of participants mentioned suffering from. Listen to Khalid’s story of how he was affected by it,

In the beginning, when I first came here, I was having nightmares all the time for approximately 2 years. Always when I sleeping, 5 times a week or so. It was that much. When I was sleeping, I would see things related to the war, like they [soldiers] are trying to attack me, they are trying to... drop bombs, I don’t know, like my parents were not safe. This is a fear I have because my parents are still there. Because of fears like this, I was very stressful. I was having these kinds of nightmares. Now I think it is a bit better.

Being that close to war has affected the participants greatly. Khalid is not the only one who mentioned war related fear. Amira, for example, noted that whenever she and her sisters heard fireworks in Turkey, they would get scared and assume they were bombs exploding. Harun also reported being afraid of planes in Istanbul at first, thinking that

they might drop bombs on the city. Each of these participants had to come up with ways to deal with their PTSD. Amira mentioned finding new hobbies to distract herself to take her mind off war. Similarly, Khalid used work and his studies as distractions. Harun, on the other hand, talked about how he began to travel and sightsee in Istanbul to, in his words, “explore its beautiful locations.” He stated that doing so affected him in a positive way and he got used to the planes.

Overall, these sources of stress are relatively unique to displaced people and come in addition to the typical stressors experienced by foreign students, such as lack of contact with loved ones and homesickness. Though it should also be noted that homesickness was reported far less than expected, possibly due to the Turkish culture having familiarities with the Syrian one, which was briefly discussed in a previous chapter. This is in line with the findings of Thomson et al. (2007), where the similarities between cultures is considered to be a reducer of homesickness.

7.3. What is The Next Step?

When asked their opinions on what the future holds for them, a number of commonalities emerged in their responses. The most common one among them was the idea of settling in Turkey on a more permanent basis. Interestingly though, that was not the plan for many of the students at first. Here is what Khalid shared on the matter,

In the beginning, when we came here, we were having in our mind, we should be very good, and we should study. We have four years to finish the university, so we hoped that the war would end so we can go back to build our country again. But unfortunately, this didn't happen. We graduated, we are doing our master now, but we cannot go back. What we were having in our minds as a hope or as an idea, it didn't happen. Before, we were speaking a lot about Syria, I think now it is a bit less. And now some of them [Syrians] are saying that even if the war ends, I don't know if we will go back or not. Because it [Syria] is just like zero, or even minus, not zero. Here they [Syrians] can improve themselves, but there it is very hard.

Khalid is not alone in his sentiment. There were other participants who could no longer wait for the end of war or see a future in Syria even if the war ends. How long can one live out of boxes, in a manner of speaking? Harun, Latif, and Naim also mentioned that they did hold out and wait without getting too involved, but in their opinion, one has to

eventually start building a home. Now that students have begun to do that, it is getting harder for them to consider going back to Syria. Consider the following comment by Anwar,

5 years ago, I wouldn't expect myself here. Five years later, I don't know where I would be. In my opinion, what I want is to build my own work here. [...] I have to be there [in Syria] in order to help rebuild when the regime goes away. But to go back to stay there? I don't think so. Even if I return, it is gonna take a lot of time to take this step, because whatever I build here [in Turkey], it is gonna go away (ruined).

The point Anwar is making is that the more of a life Syrians build in Turkey, the harder it gets to uproot it all and move back. It should also be mentioned that building a life also includes continuing education. This is significant because, Harun pointed out in the following statement, the more educated students get, the more difficult it may become for them to return,

I don't think I would be able to find work that I can do with my degree. Especially in electric electronic field. There is a war going on there. There were already few firms to work for, in terms of work and education. It was hard to find work. Even before the war, in Syria, people would leave [Syria] after graduating from university. For example, doctors and engineers would all leave to Europe, Saudi Arabia, or Dubai. If I return now, I would have returned for no reason.

According to Harun's report, the already limited opportunities for employment available to highly educated shrunk even further due to war, making his return complicated. Even though this might be the case, many students stressed their desire to continue their education and put getting educated forth as the most effective way for them to help Syria overall. Amira had the following to say to the people who told her to return and fight in the war,

My brother also faces these. [He is asked by Turks] Why did he apply to the medical field? Because Syrian people need doctors. I mean we all have our goals. They are saying, "He is a man, why isn't he fighting?" Why should he fight? He would die and disappear. For no reason, benefitting nothing. For example, my other brother died in the war and what good was that? Was Syria saved? It was not saved. Because right now, Syria does not need war. We cannot do anything because you are fighting with guns and they are using bombs. What can you do? The weapons may not be of use but our knowledge may accomplish something. He [Amira's brother] is studying to be a doctor or a pharmacist. With that, he can do something.

Amira was extremely passionate in her recounting. Throughout her interview, she had stressed numerous times the importance of knowledge and learning, for Turks and Syrians alike, in order both to get along better with others and to help build a better future. Her opinion on the need for further education and her plans to continue in Turkey as a student were also shared by others during the interviews, specifically by Hilmi, Khalid, Naim, Maya, and Harun.

Overall, these findings also align with the numbers mentioned in Erdoğan and Erdoğan (2018), which reports that over 50% of the students showed their desire to remain in Turkey. In fact, the study reports that 80% of the students are unlikely to return.

8. CONCLUSION

Considering their stories, the Syrian students that participated in the study, prior to their entry to Turkey, went through extreme war conditions, which compelled them to leave Syria. According to the accounts of the students, bombardments and random shootings that posed a serious threat to the Syrians became an everyday occurrence. Besides being worried about their own safety, they also had to suffer the loss of their loved ones. Houses were destroyed displacing many Syrians within the country in pursuit of safety. The students also mentioned that due to the severe conditions, they lacked their basic necessities, such as food and shelter. The situation also affected the people economically as the prices went up and employment became a huge problem. What's more, as chaos prevailed in the country, this also caused the crimes rates, such as rapes, to increase and the justice system to break down. Also experienced by some of the students, unfair arrests and imprisonments became quite common due to the lax enforcement of the laws. One other reason the students mentioned for why they had to leave their homeland was that most of the schools got closed and education stopped completely in war-torn areas. As is understood from their accounting, education is valued a lot by almost all participants in the study. Therefore, to be able to get back to school, they had to leave their country. One issue the male participants who had to suspend their education faced was conscription. The reason they avoided being enrolled in the military, as stated by one of the participants, was because it was a civil war and they were not willing to fight against other citizens like them. Hence, to continue their education and not to be conscripted into the army, they had no chance but to leave their country.

When they came to Turkey, the students observed that Turkey is full of variety in terms of lifestyles. They observed this variety especially in Istanbul. That is, they observed that districts such as Fatih, Beylikdüzü, Kadıköy, Taksim and Ümraniye are all different from each other, which some of them liked and some others did not because this, according to

them, makes it hard to predict what sort of a place they will be in next, causing those participants to be afraid of travelling. Although they found city life stressful and people there aggressive due to the busy nature of the city, almost all students stated that Turkish culture, in many aspects, is similar to that of Syria, which to some extent eased their adaptation process. They particularly stressed being in an Islamic country like theirs as a major positive. Moreover, they found Turkish people too preoccupied with their political affiliations. They think that different political opinions is something that segregates Turkish people. They also mentioned inquisitiveness as a major character of Turkish people, which they regarded as another aspect of Turkish society manifesting itself in the form of excessive questioning and sometimes unsolicited advice.

As for funding of education, one thing all students commonly stressed was that they are not being funded by the government, and they do not receive education free of charge. The main sources of funding they mentioned that they received were their families, scholarships provided by their school (none of them have full scholarship), or some other NGOs and institutions, and part-time jobs that they had. As for the services provided for them by their university, the students mentioned the mentoring system, which was of great assistance to them in terms of academic adaptation. They also mentioned that they could benefit from psychological counseling services, clubs and language support. These services available to all on campus were of great use to Syrian students throughout their adaptation.

When it comes to relationships, students stated that the instructors are usually easy to communicate with, which some of them were not used to back in their countries where there was a more serious hierarchical relationship between the teachers and the students. As for their interaction with the other Turkish students in a nonacademic context, while some of them have positive experiences and find it easy to become friends with Turkish students, some others claimed the opposite. Nevertheless, almost all the students stated that they suffered from language barrier in an academic setting, especially in group-work tasks. They stated as a common problem that Turkish students prefer other Turkish students to be able to finish their tasks easily by speaking in Turkish with each other, not in English, which is the medium of instruction in most departments of the university.

Although they considered the inability to freely participate in the group tasks a missed learning opportunity, Syrian students do not regard this matter as a sign of discrimination towards Syrians specifically. Most of them tend to attribute it to Turkish students' efficiency and familiarity concerns. Therefore, it can be deduced that the existence of a common language and language preferences tremendously affect how relationships are formed. Further, considering the interactions had outside campus, students almost unanimously had severe communication problems, initially. However, as they interacted with Turkish citizens and continued taking Turkish classes on campus, their language issues slowly and gradually lessened.

Apart from the interpersonal communication issues, the lack of a common language also impacted students on an individual level. For example, the lack of interaction with others led to severe cases of stress and loneliness in some participants. Others had difficulty communicating with officials in locations such as banks or student affairs office and were unable to complete the basic steps required to be identified as a student, like acquiring a student identification card. This language problem also deprived some participants from exploring additional learning opportunities like attending conferences, especially those that are outside their own university. On a more urgent note, students faced complications in keeping up with the coursework in some programs where the medium of education is not English. In programs where multiple languages are used, participants reported being able to only partially follow the in-class instructions and discussions. This is a particularly difficult issue to resolve, since learning an academic register of one language is a time-consuming undertaking and expecting students to learn multiple academic registers while taking regular classes in parallel would lead to an unreasonable amount of workload. To resolve most of these issues, a number of participants suggested making more advanced Turkish lessons mandatory in order to go beyond learning daily language use and begin exploring academic language use. Besides on campus complications, the lack of common language skills also affected Syrians as individuals while looking for work. As reported by the participants, there were Syrians who could not transfer their expert knowledge from their occupations in Syria, and had to work in fields that do not require communication.

What students discussed on the matter of discrimination is in line with the reflections of the tense Turkish-Syrian relationship in the media. From the students' accounts, it seems that discrimination caused by preconceptions is a prevalent issue. Most of the students think that local people treat them differently than the other foreigners in the country because of their Syrian identity. They mentioned that they are being treated like they are poor and have criminal tendencies. They come across such treatments especially when looking for a house to rent, where the revelation of their Syrian identities cause the homeowners or neighbors to react in a hostile manner. This could be the result of overgeneralization that was discussed by some of the participants, as a desperate and small percentage of Syrians, during their initial entry to Turkey, displayed certain behaviors, such as dodging rent that has given cause to this hostility. Moreover, students also feel overwhelmed by the belief that the Turkish government is financially supporting all Syrians in Turkey. They repeatedly underlined that they do not receive any aid from the government. Also, they believe preconceptions are formed due to people's lack of general knowledge about Syria, which lead to questions like "Do you have cars or camels for transportation?", which implies the assumption that Syria has always been an impoverished country.

Syrians are also seen as cheap workers, and their desperate situation, especially in the initial stages of their stay in Turkey, has been taken advantage of by job owners. However, as is understood by students' stories, Syrians accept cheap labor because they need to find a job to survive, but some of them are inexperienced due to their young age, and, thus, exploited as child workers, and some others lack the necessary documents to prove that they have experience. Many situations like these leave them no choice but to accept any offer by the employers no matter how unfair. In some locations in Turkey where predominantly blue-collar workers live, Syrians are blamed for competition, taking the jobs of locals from their hands by accepting low wages.

One other point to make is that Syrians do not face discriminatory treatments from Turkish people only. A few of the students personally experienced hostility from other Syrians for not providing an expected and excessive amount of assistance, which would have come at a cost to the participants themselves. In any case, as reported by the

participants, the longer people from both countries interacted with one another, the more tolerant or even understanding they have become, leading to a marked decline in the cases of discrimination.

Nevertheless, a number of defense mechanisms were developed by the Syrian students participating in the study in order to avoid discrimination, first of which was the masking of their identities. Expecting to face negative reactions to their Syrian backgrounds and knowing that Arabic is not being spoken solely in their home country, a number of participants decided to present themselves as if they were from other countries, such as Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates. Although this masking was done mainly to avoid conflict, there was also a participant who reported that the avoidance of Syrian identity was to forget everything related to Syria, which reminded the participant almost exclusively of war and the negative memories associated with it. Avoidance was not done through masking alone. Some participants preferred to simply not interact at all. In milder cases, this meant not using Arabic until too far away to hear in order not to be identified. In other examples, the participants avoided interaction entirely or made themselves undesirable for interaction by wearing headphones and such.

Students also reportedly developed a great deal of stress due to a number of non-language related factors. For example, they reported being constantly worried about angering the locals by giving wrong responses. As the opinions on Syrians differ from person to person in Turkey, the responses they prefer to questions such as “Will you remain in Turkey or return to Syria?” also differ greatly, which led the students to never know what kind of a reaction they are going to get and become stressed out during the interaction. On that note, questions related to future in general were reported as a constant source of worry, considering the fact that the alternatives to staying in Turkey are extremely limited for many. Of course, there is also the war related stress. Some participants reported occurrences seen in those suffering from PTSD, such as having nightmares for years related to war, being afraid that planes passing overhead would drop bombs, and thinking firework displays are bombings. Although the participants reported finding coping mechanisms like exploring the city or taking up a hobby, complete recovery have not occurred for most.

When asked what the future holds for them, participants, almost universally, expressed their plans to continue staying in Turkey to build a life for themselves. The only exception to this was one student who expressed his desire to eventually move to Germany. It is, however, interesting to note that the participants' original plans were to return to Syria as soon as possible. While they had initially only planned to study or work for a year or two, students mentioned that the end of war got harder and harder to see as months went by. According to the reports, the longer they stayed in Turkey, the harder it became for them to imagine leaving due to becoming more familiar with and investing in Turkey. There were also participants who considered staying in Turkey and continuing their education the most effective way to contribute to ending the war. Additionally, some participants with more specialized majors mentioned that, were they to return to Syria, their education and expertise would be wasted until a certain amount of rebuilding is complete.

Overall, the study confirmed a number of findings in the literature as well as diverging in places. For example, Watenpaugh et al. (2014) reported inaccessibility of information regarding academic opportunities, but in the current study, no such difficulty was reported as a serious matter before or after the entry to university by the students. However, the participants did encounter problems based on language similarly reported by Watenpaugh et al. (2014) in higher education due to Turkish being commonly used in various places. Continuing with language related research, Sherry et al. (2010) reported students going through social, academic, and psychological difficulties when their proficiency in the dominant language of the country is low, which was also explored in the current study on numerous occasions. One student participating in the study had prior experience with Turkish language and culture before, and his initial experience was far more positive than other participants, which aligns with the findings of Kim and Kim (2016). Hohberger's (2018) findings regarding socialization problems and a feeling of emotional distance associated with the language proficiency limitations were observed in the current study, although the participants having access to English as well as Turkish allowed for more opportunities to interact, lessening the potential blow of such problems. Loneliness discussed by Weiss (as cited in Terrell-Deutsch, 1999) as a byproduct of a lack of social interaction, had less of an impact in the current study than expected, likely due to students' access to multiple languages, and thus multiple avenues of communication.

McCormack's (1998) accounting of students without sufficient knowledge of the common language facing discrimination more than others was observed in the current study, however, in many cases, rather than the lack of Turkish knowledge, it was the display of Arabic knowledge that identified the participants as Syrians and resulted in difficulties. It should also be mentioned that, in parallel with Oberg's (1960) finding of difficulties diminishing over time, students reported developing more harmonious relationships as the years went by. Overall, students had not reported feeling homesickness as much. Since they have also talked frequently of how similar Turkish culture is to their own, this could align with the findings of Thomson et al. (2007), where homesickness could be reduced by the likeness of the target culture to one's own. However, as the participants were displaced by war, it could also be the case where remembering home is not ideal for them for various previously discussed reasons. One significant difference from the literature was with YÖK's report (2017) of Syrian students encountering difficulties related to proper documentation about their prior education including lack of proof of academic proficiency, incomplete documentation and diploma equivalency certificates. Although one participant reported going through such difficulties, the rest had no problems starting or continuing their education. Finally, concerning the participants' future plans, the findings echo Erdoğan (2018), where students were more willing to stay in Turkey than return to Syria. One significant difference is that up until their first or second years after entry, participants were more in favor of returning to Syria. However, their continued stay influenced them enough to reverse their opinions.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Interview Questions

Background questions:

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. Are you married or single?
4. How many languages can you speak?
5. What is your major?
6. How long have you been in Turkey?
7. Where do you stay in Turkey?
8. Can you tell about how you came to Turkey? What did you go through in this process?

In the Campus:

10. Can you tell about the process of your acceptance to this university in detail?
11. Did you get any help from anyone in this process?
12. From your own perspective, what do you think is the biggest challenge of studying in Turkey?
13. Does the school provide you with any services to help you with your adaptation in school?
14. How is your relationship with your instructors?
15. How is your relationship with other students at school?
16. How easily can you work with your Turkish classmates on a class task?
17. How do you feel in general within the premises of the school?
18. How satisfied are you with your student life in Turkey?
19. What would you be doing now if you had not been accepted to a university here?

Off Campus:

20. Can you describe your neighborhood?
21. Can you tell about your relationship with your neighbors?
22. How would you describe Turkish society in terms of people's attitudes towards each other?
23. What do you think about Turkish people's attitudes towards Syrian people?
24. Have you faced any difficulty in your social life because of your nationality?
25. Have you had trouble while using public services (transport, hospitals, etc.)
26. What can you tell about the process of your adaptation to Turkish culture and the way of living here?
27. How do you see your future in Turkey? Are you planning to return to Syria?

Psychological:

28. Do you ever feel homesick or lonely?
 30. Do you feel any stress/distress in your life?

Economic:

31. How do you fund your education?
 32. How do you live by in Turkey?

Appendix 2: Profiles of the Participants

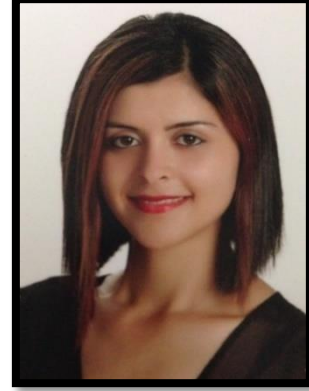
Name	Gender	Age	Length of Stay in Turkey	Level of Education	Type of Interview
Aisha	Female	22	2 years	Undergraduate Student	Focus Group
Amira	Female	20	3 years	Undergraduate Student	Individual
Anwar	Male	22	5 years	Undergraduate Student	Individual
Burhan	Male	23	5 years /	Master's Student	Focus Group
Essam	Female	22	5 years	Undergraduate Student	Focus Group
Harun	Male	22	5 years	Undergraduate Student	Individual
Hilmi	Male	28	3 years	Undergraduate Student	Individual
Jamil	Male	20	5 years	Undergraduate Student	Individual
Khalid	Male	23	5 years /	Master's Student	Individual
Latif	Male	27	4 years	Undergraduate Student	Individual
Lely	Female	22	1,5 years	Undergraduate Student	Individual
Malika*	Female	22	5 years	Undergraduate Student	Focus Group
Maya	Female	21	4 years	Undergraduate Student	Individual
Mehdi	Male	24	7 years	Undergraduate Student	Individual
Naim	Male	21	6 years	Undergraduate Student	Individual
Rima	Female	20	5 years	Undergraduate Student	Individual
Sayid	Male	19	1 year	Undergraduate Student	Individual
Souzan	Female	22	3,5 years	Undergraduate Student	Individual
Yara	Female	22	5 years	Undergraduate Student	Individual

*Malika's accountings have not been included in the study.

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