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Research Article

A STUDY ON THE PROBLEMS FACED BY INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND THEIR WAYS OF COPING WITH THEM: THE CASE OF VAN YÜZÜNCÜ YIL UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

One of the most important facts of our era is the globalization process that turns the whole world virtually into a little village by diminishing the importance of both time and space, and geographical and cultural borders. The process of globalization that transforms social, economic and technological developments in a speed incomparable to no other phase of the history and that redesigns the modern world with its consequences, manifests itself mostly in educational processes, information technologies and especially in the universities that are knowledge production centers. As knowledge became a value in itself, as the need for qualified workforce equipped with professional skills and the added-value of information technologies started to become important in national budgets, both the universities and the higher education are transformed into knowledge production centers rather than knowledge disseminating places, educational activities are transformed into global markets, and increasing numbers of international students started to benefit from this. This process also resulted in an ever-increasing demand for higher education and adoption of different country-based projects to attract international students. As a result of the increasing appreciation of the importance of higher education and international student mobility in the process of the global information society, different strategies and programs are being implemented in Turkey as in many other countries. Therefore, Turkey has signed agreements with many countries and welcomed international students to its universities. This study primarily aims to determine the problems faced by international students in education and to understand their ways of coping with those problems in the case of Van Yüzüncü Yıl University in Turkey.

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INTRODUCTION

Globalization has become one of the most important concepts that describe the world we live in. Globalization marked the era of post-1980s when historical and social changes were most intense. Especially after the collapse of the Soviet block and the emergence of a uni-polar world led by the US gave a chance to global forces waiting for their turn in the international arena. These forces who are also the main actors of the globalization process acted on to possess world resources more and to eliminate the barriers before the capital. In other words, they have acted on to predominate the political economy of capitalism and neoliberal ideology. The process called globalization is, in fact, a process of transforming the world into a small space using science and technology and transforming knowledge into a marketable thing generating added-value.

Modern societies that evolved from agricultural societies into industrial societies, and then into knowledge societies, are trying to implement changes that will start a new era in structural and institutional levels. There is also a process of discussion led by the developed countries on how to interpret this change. It seems quite difficult to define and label a process which is sometimes called late modernism, post-modernism and sometimes called information society, and on which many discussions go on. Our societies are being transformed in a speed unparalleled in the history. Reading, understanding and analyzing this change and transformation clearly are both difficult and necessitate time. However, it is certain that our world neither shows entirely the characteristics of industrial society nor totally surpassed it as some argue. It can be argued perhaps that the modernity has completed its historical role and gave way to an experience of modernity that

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is liquid. Although it is not possible to know or foresee what will happen in the future, it can be said that the process of globalization we are experiencing is dragging us towards a new world design both in social and economic terms and also political and cultural terms. Since the actors of this new world order is not states but the capital itself, and since the capital controls educational processes, the traditional functions of science and universities as centers of scientific production are also changing.

All educational institutions, mainly higher education institutions, have undergone radical changes due to the realization that knowledge is power and the implementation of neoliberal policies that limited the role of nation-states in education. The education in general, and specifically the higher education, deviated from being free of charge public service provided by the state and has been privatized and globalized. Every aspect of education has been transformed into a commodity commercialized and sold directly by capitalism. Higher education is the most influenced branch of education from this process since it has produced the highest profit and cash flow to the state budget. Recognition of this fact in time resulted in the global and systematic supply of educational service by the countries. Higher education services given in at international level has become one of the most important sources of income of countries.

As the importance of information technologies, the number of students, and the need for qualified labor force and professional specialization increase in post-industrial societies, the need for higher education also increases. Financial capital gave way to the human capital in the era we are living in as a result of the endeavor of education to increase professional skills. Countries that have qualified labor force and that are competent in the use of information and technology invested in education more and gave more importance to higher education. The most important centers that increase the competitiveness of these countries and that transform knowledge into technology, is the universities, have become educational institutions giving qualified and high-quality education. Therefore, the most influential universities are found in America and the Europe, and millions of students go abroad every year to study in these universities.

The Increasing Importance of Higher Education in Today's World and International Student Mobility

One of the most important developments of the post-1980s in the world was undoubtedly the process of globalization, that diminished the importance of borders among countries, that lifted the political, cultural and geographical barriers, that created new social networks and activities in addition to increasing the existing ones (Steger, 2006:7). This process, which resulted in mutual dependency and integration of countries, also changed the political and economic actors of the world order. In this new world order, global finance sectors pervaded the whole world, and concepts of distance and range lost their importance using new technologies. The generation of social dependencies, the abolition of classical and traditional functions of the state especially by global capital resulted in the gradual transformation of the world into a network society (Castells, 2013).

The globalization process that transformed the world into a network society not only caused the flow of objects, the capital or services using technological instruments but also transformed educational programs and higher education into a knowledge market and economy that paved the way for the flow of culture, values, and knowledge (Gürüz, 2011). The most important factor behind this knowledge economy is the information technology that brings the societies together. In a network society, knowledge is regarded as a value that generates and enhances the capital. Countries that are aware of this fact invest all their energy in the institutions and activities that create knowledge. That is why in developed countries, education is a high-quality field with many opportunities. In addition to this, developed countries raise qualified labor force and transform the knowledge generated in educational processes into technology.

In these countries, education is considered as an investment tool and educational institutions as commercial areas serving for their customers. The most developed countries of our era are Western countries which invested mostly in education with their universities and institutes conducting independent research and development activities. Therefore, it is not coincidental that European and American universities where high-quality education is given are the ones that attract the highest number of international students. The universities, which make use of direct and indirect opportunities for education in general and international education,, welcome thousands of international students from different countries and thus make a profit.

Economic profit of higher and international education grows the appetite of great universities in global scale and attracts the attention of countries. The expenses of the family members of the international students coming along with them would contribute added value to the national economy of that country. According to the data of US Department of Commerce for 2000, the added value provided by the international students residing in the US for higher education ranked 5th among services sector (Stephenson, 2004 cited in Kıröğlu, *et al.*, 2010:26-39). The number of expenditures by international students in the US for 2011-2012 educational years was 29.8 billion US dollars; the number of expenditures by international students in Canada for 2010 was 7.5 billion. The share of higher education in educational trade in England for 2009 was around 12.2 billion; and Australia obtained an income around 14 billion in 2009 from international education (Department of Development report, 2015:2).

Billions of dollars of expenditure for higher education necessitated the countries to take it more seriously because the total amount of expenditure for it constitutes the most important revenue item after tourism for countries. According to an OECD report for 2008, while the number of international students around the world was 600,000 in 1975, this number increased five folds in 2006 and rose to 3 billion (Kıröğlu *et al.*, 2010:26). It is expected that the number of international students around the world, which was around 4 million in 2010, will rise to 7 billion in 2025 (Bohm *et al.*, 2002).

As emphasized above, the flow of international students abroad has increased remarkably with the process of globalization.

This flow occurs mostly from the developing third world countries, or from Asian countries, to the developed countries. Especially the Chinese, Taiwanese and Indian students prefer the US for science and engineering PhD education (see Figure 1). China and India constitute the biggest market for the international student flow to Europe and the US. Especially the US is the biggest host country for international students (Kumar, 2008).

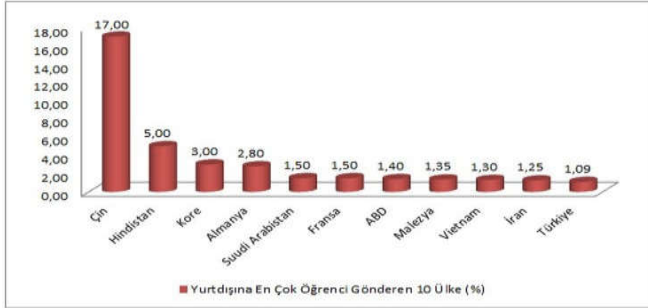


Figure 1 Countries with the highest number of outgoing international students

Source: <http://akademisyenler.org/uluslararasi-ogrenci-hareketliliği-ve-türkiye/22.01.2017>.

Many students from East Asian countries, especially from China, India, and Korea, prefer foreign countries for higher education. The most important reason of this is the high number of technological investments, and foreign capital flows in these countries. East Asian countries succeeded in getting into economic literature with the name of Asian tigers in recent years and attracted the attention with their high-quality education programs, high technology and the added value they created. Some of the giant technologies of the world make production in these countries. China and India are primary countries where the foreign capital flood in and make technological investments.

These countries severely necessitate qualified labor force and intermediate staff to produce science and technology. Since they lack educational institutions qualified and equipped to meet this demand, the students prefer studying abroad. Hundreds of thousands of Chinese students study at the most prestigious universities in the US every year. Especially the universities that provide technical formation are preferred by them. The students who spend thousands of dollars in a year in these universities have the opportunity to have good jobs when they go back to their countries with their degrees. Thus, the international student mobility shows that the direction of mobility is from developing countries to the developed Western countries.

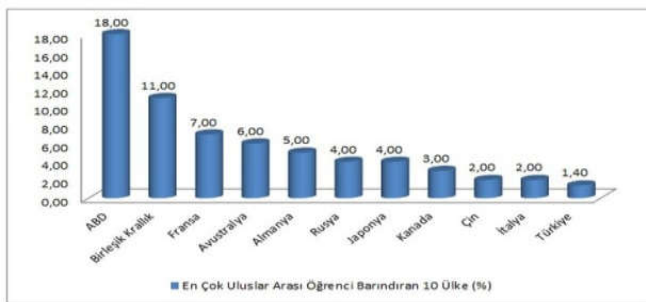


Figure 2 Most preferred countries by outgoing international students

Source: <http://akademisyenler.org/uluslararasi-ogrenci-hareketliliği-ve-türkiye/22.01.2017>

The most important aim of the international students going abroad is, as emphasized above, to get high-quality education and have good jobs when they return their countries. Therefore, they prefer universities giving high-quality education and requiring high tuition fees (see Figure 2).

As higher education became a global market, universities that provide international education have started to offer desirable conditions and scholarships both for education and work to attract international students. Apart from this, a range of programs designed according to the needs of students are prepared to transfer students from countries with the dense young population.

According to the UNESCO data, universities preferred by international students the most are in the US. In the US, where there are more than five thousand universities, high level and high-quality education is provided. American universities are listed mostly in the first ranks in annual researches. Top three developed European countries, England, France and Germany, follow the US. While the US and Europe take the lead regarding hosting the international student mobility, East Asian countries are the ones that send the highest number of students to these countries for higher education. Unfortunately, Turkey is one of the countries that attract the least number of international students. There are several reasons behind Turkey's failure of benefitting from this sector and getting its deserved place, such as.

The Policy of Turkey on International Students in Higher Education

First official regulations regarding international student hosting in Turkey dates back to 1989s, following educational agreements between Turkey and Turkic Republics after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Hosting international students was one of the most important subjects Turkey elaborated on in that period. It was seen that international student mobility both developed collaboration between the countries and contributed to national income through the expenditures of international students. Considering these facts, the then-president Turgut Özal commenced international student mobility programs by developing close affiliation especially with relative communities in Turkic Republics.

International students are accepted to universities in Turkey if they pass International Student Examination (abbreviated as YÖS in Turkish). There is also an exam for students from Turkic Republics and Relative Communities (abbreviated as TCS in Turkish). As explained above, as higher education became a global market and several countries acted on to benefit from it, Turkey also took some steps about it. The first regulation regarding international students in Turkey was put into effect in 1983 with the law on international students studying in Turkey. The concept of international students as used in the law includes international students studying in Turkey using some agreements. The first definition of international students in Turkish legislation was used in the regulation dated April 30, 1985, on international students studying in Turkey. As defined in this regulation, an international student is "a non-Turkish citizen studying in educational institutions in all degrees or Turkish language courses in Turkey" (Cevher, 2016:338).

Since Turkey is a country which hardly contributes to the global information economy, it sends students abroad rather than hosting international students. In higher education, universities offering advanced technical education and particularly foreign language education are preferred more. The international student mobility data show that tens of thousands of students go abroad from Turkey every year. The US ranks first among these countries. Germany, Bulgaria, England, Australia, France, Bosnia-Hersek, Ukraine, and Italy follow the US (see Figure 3). Students who prefer the US go there to have education especially in technical sciences, medicine, and engineering is in the first place. Some of these students who benefit from state funds, while there are students who study through their own means. Students who prefer European countries, like the Balkan countries and Russia, study social sciences like law and international relations along with positive sciences. Generally, middle-class students prefer to study in these countries where tuition fees are lower, living standards, language and culture are similar, and transportation is easy. In addition to this, state universities offer some scholarship to international students in these countries where language education and higher education is relatively easier. A significant number of international students benefit from scholarships in these countries.

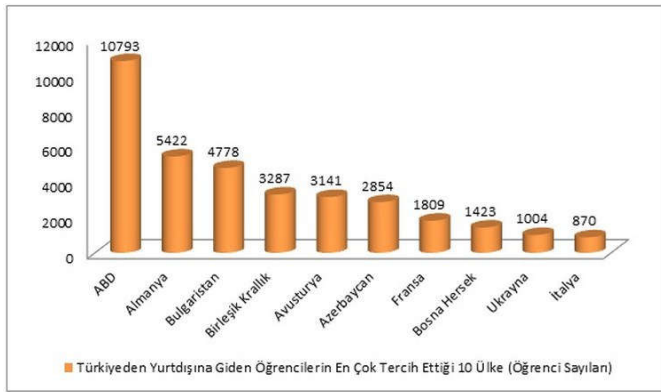


Figure 3 First 10 countries where 45 thousand Turkish students study

Source: <http://akademisyenler.org/uluslararasi-ogrenci-hareketliliği-ve-türkiye/22.01.2017>.

Until recently Turkey was a country that was sending its students abroad for higher education, however, nowadays while Turkey has been sending students abroad, it is receiving international students especially from Turkic Republics and Arab and Muslim countries. The bilateral agreements signed between the Ministry of Education and other various countries and international student exchange programs made Turkey a point of interest with regards to international student mobility (see Figure 4). To attract more international students and to increase the share of Turkey in the existing higher education market, various programs to promote students are actualized, and the regulation is made more convenient. The incoming students were provided with some advantages regarding the tuition fees, monthly scholarships and exemptions from pecuniary obligations (Çağlar, 1999: 134). These benefits are mostly utilized by the students coming from Central Asian Turkic Republics that are classified as Turkey's relative communities, and with whom Turkey has a close affinity. Most of the international students coming to Turkey for higher

education are from the Turkic republics established following the collapse of the Soviet Union. In addition to this, Turkey has attracted a considerable number of students from the previous Eastern Bloc countries and African countries following the educational agreements signed with them. The geographical location of Turkey serving as a bridge between Asia, Europe, and Africa facilitated Turkey to host international student mobility. Furthermore, the ongoing conflicts, ethnic and sectarian violence in the Arab Peninsula caused huge mass migrations especially to neighboring countries, forcing the people to integrate into the educational system of the migrated country.

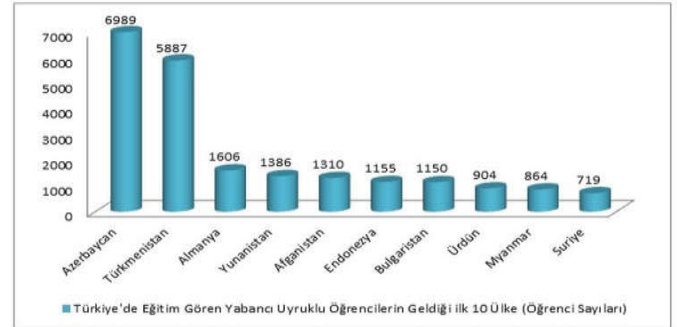


Figure 4 The distribution of 55 thousand international students in Turkey according to their nationality

Source: <http://akademisyenler.org/uluslararasi-ogrenci-hareketliliği-ve-türkiye/22.01.2017>

The number of international students coming to Turkey to for higher education is ever increasing. Turkey, as a more developed country compared to its neighbors and serving as a bridge between Asia and Europe, receives students from neighboring countries, mainly from the Central Asia. Though the total number of international students amounts to 55 thousand, it is relatively small compared to the numbers in the US, England, Germany or Australia. In spite of its given advantages due to its geopolitical position, Turkey suffers from political instability and lack of proper educational policy, so failing to attract more international students (see Figure 5). Thus, the data show that there are a constant fluctuation and no steady increase in terms of the international student numbers of Turkey in the recent past.

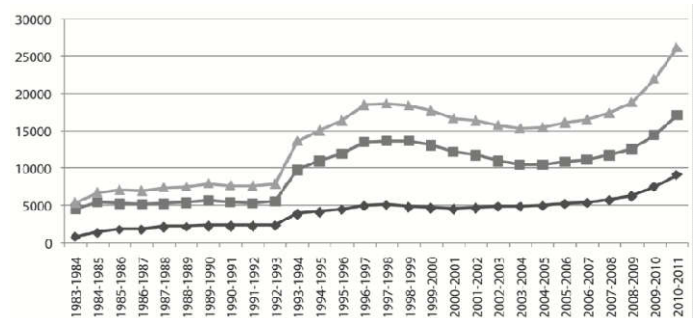


Figure 5 Numbers of international student in Turkey (1990-2010)

Source: Özoğlu M. et al. (2012:51-52).

As the data in Table 1 show, there is a constant fluctuation in international student numbers according to years. The incoming students generally prefer universities in metropolises, mainly like İstanbul, Ankara and İzmir, and also Bursa and Konya. Two basic reasons stand out in terms of university choices.

First of all, the best universities in Turkey are in these cities, the medium of instruction is a foreign language in some of them, the received diplomas have international accreditation, they offer social and cultural facilities; and secondly, these universities are located in metropolises.

Table 1 Universities in Turkey with the highest number of international students (2010-2011)

	Universities	Total	New registration
1	Anadolu University	4.040	306
2	Istanbul University	2.611	689
3	Middle East Technical University	1.487	314
4	Ankara University	1.350	331
5	Marmara University	1.334	289
6	Selçuk University	958	196
7	Ege University	918	169
8	Uludağ University	886	199
9	Hacettepe University	859	215
10	Gazi University	838	159

Source: Gathered from higher education statistics for the academic year 2010-2011 cited in Özöglü *et al.* (2012:55).

As is the case in many other countries, international students who come to Turkey for higher education may encounter various problems during their education, sometimes causing them to quit their education. These problems can be categorized as social, cultural, economic and educational problems. The most commonly faced problems by these students, which generally hinder their education, are language and communication problems, followed by income and economic disparities, sexuality, social integration and their concerns about them (Sungur, *et al.*, 2016:107).

The most important problem faced by international students during their education in Turkey is the reported as language problem in the published studies (Musaoğlu, 2016:14; Güçlü 1996; Can, 1996, cited in, Enterieva *et al.*, 2016; Aliyev *et al.*, 2016). The findings showed that students encountered many problems related to language both in the academic and daily life, like problems in understanding the courses, communicating, getting consultancy services, understanding slang and pronouncing words. Since students were unable to communicate effectively, these students fail to express themselves, they were unable to express their problems and thus failed in their academic lives. Though overcoming the language barrier necessitate time, the students tried to overcome it by language courses and reading practices.

Lack of communication caused by language disparity with their course instructors results in absenteeism, lack of concentration, failure to ask questions in classes and thus academic failure. It is observed that the students were alienated from the educational process, break away from the social life, encountered many psychological problems mainly like maladjustment and loneliness. As indicated above, language problem was the most important difficulty in all the problems that influenced education. Özçetin (2013: 81) conducted research with 221 international students registered in Bursa province in the 2011-2012 academic year. (The findings showed that The most common problems faced by international students in higher education in Bursa province, who registered either through international student exchange programs or personal means, are 22% dormitory life, 21% speaking Turkish, 17.2% cultural differences, 16.3% loneliness,

respectively. In Özçetin's study, the students expressed that they faced language barrier due to cultural differences, could not express themselves easily, and were not successful in asking questions, reading, writing, comprehending, participating in the class, note-taking, asking or answering questions during the class. However, these problems were among international students who were not from Turkic Republics.

With the participation of students from 28 countries, in another study Yıldırım, *et al.*, (2016:32) conducted students expressed that they preferred Turkey since it is a developed country and offers high- quality education. Students reported that they preferred Turkey because Turkey was an Islamic country, they had relatives in Turkey, Turkey was a developed country and offered high- quality education, Turkey was cheap and also because students are familiar with the Turkish culture. International students may face notably language and social problems, and financial, psychological and sociological problems. The students may also experience loneliness, maladjustment, cultural shock, economic problems, nutrition, housing and academic problems.

There are several studies in the literature about international students in higher education in Turkey (see Çağlar, 1999; Barut *et al.*, 2012; Enterieva, *et al.*, 2016; Hayati, 2010; Musaoğlu, 2016; Aliyev, *et al.*, 2016; Özkan, *et al.*, 2015; Güçlü, 1996). Although students from different countries come to Turkey for educational purposes, a considerable number of students are coming from the Turkic Republics, most of them are male, and belong to middle and lower-class income groups (Paksoy, *et al.*, 2012:92; Çağlar, 1999:162). The most important reason for these students for choosing Turkey is the mutual language and cultural similarity. A study on the problems of undergraduate students from Turkic Republics (Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Georgia) who registered either through international student exchange programs or personal means revealed the following findings (Kıroğlu *et al.*, 2010:33-34):

1. Almost all of the international students preferred primarily to befriend other students from their own country, and secondly Turkish students. Most of the students did not experience the feeling of exclusion and expressed that Turkish students were generally not prejudiced against them.
2. Most of the international students had financial problems and carried on their education with the financial help from their families.
3. None of the international students had housing problems, and most of them shared apartments with their friends.
4. Almost all of the students felt homesick, missing their families, friends, and countries.
5. The students' evaluation of Turkish food culture varied. Most of the students had problems with Turkish food when they first arrived in Turkey, and yet they got used to in time.
6. Most of the international students did not have problems with clothing. However, some of the students had problems of harassment because of their clothing style.

7. Almost all of the students were easy with the culture and the tradition since it was similar to the traditions of their own countries.

Çağlar (1999:151-154) conducted research on international students from Turkic Republics and relative communities who came to Turkey for higher education. (Çağlar's findings revealed the most common problem students faced was academic difficulties. Approximately 88.1% of the students reported that they followed their courses but 33.8% of them said that their courses were boring and difficult, and 9% of them said they had problems with their instructors. 68% of them said, "My adviser does not care about me," 17.2% of them said, "I do not have an adviser", and 14.3% of them said, "I do not know who my adviser is." The students who said they failed their courses reported the following reasons: the courses were difficult (22%), language problems they encountered (19%), of financial problems (17%) and insufficient course materials (12%).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Setting

Van Yüzüncü Yıl University, which had a total number of 781 international students from 17 different countries, has been making great attempts in the past couple of years to become one of the major universities in the region attracting more international students each year. The university administration is making great efforts to sign bilateral agreements with countries worldwide to speed up the student exchange process. Van Yüzüncü Yıl University is one of the most demanded universities in the region among international students.

This study focuses on the problems international students at Van Yüzüncü Yıl University encountered and coping strategies they used to deal with the problems. As it is known, because the international education has become a global sector and international students have a considerable contribution to the added value of the national economy, important steps are taken especially by prestigious universities in Turkey and the Higher Education Board of Turkey (abbreviated as YÖK in Turkish) to welcome more international students. As one of the most long-established universities of the East Anatolian region of Turkey, Van Yüzüncü Yıl University was integrated into this process and received considerable number of students by signing bilateral agreements with especially neighboring countries North Iraq and Iran, and also Egypt, Pakistan, Azerbaijan, the US and, by means of the Erasmus program, the EU.

Present Research

Surveys and interviews were used to collect data for the triangulation of the findings given that each data collection type may have some weaknesses. International undergraduate, graduate and PhD p students took part in this study with the active participation of 10 students from different countries. Students' socio-demographic features were obtained using surveys and these data are analyzed by the SPSS program. Focus group discussions were performed to reveal the problems students encountered and the coping strategies they used.

In the qualitative analysis part of this study, the students were informed beforehand to meet at a specified time for the focus

group interviews. These face to face interviews with ten students from different countries were conducted in an office room at the university. Content analysis was performed to analyze interview data. The underlying reason behind choosing focus group technique was to obtain simultaneous information from students and to have a chance to listen to their problems in the same environment. The most important advantage of this interview technique is that it enables the interviewees to express their ideas, feelings, and attitudes freely by taking strength from each other (Gubrium-Holstein, 2001).

Quantitative Findings of the Research There were 781 actively registered international students from undergraduate, graduate and master's degree level in the 2016-2017 academic year (see Table 2). 73% of the students were male, 27% of them were female.

Table 2 Age distribution of international students and their registration type

	Age range	Frequency	Registration type	Number	Percentage
1	17-20	33	1 Institute	346	0,443
2	21-24	286	2 The Examination for International Students for Higher Education Programs in Turkey (YÖS)	209	0,268
3	25-28	169	3 Higher Education Entrance Examination for the children of workers abroad (YÇS)	2	0,003
4	29-32	135	4 Undergraduate transfer	16	0,020
5	33-36	67	5 Scholarship for students from Turkic Republics and Relative Communities (YTB Scholarship)	199	0,255
6	37 - +	91	6 Scholarship from Turkey	3	0,004
	Total	781	7 Transfer by the decision of the Higher Education Board of Turkey	5	0,006
			8 ERASMUS	1	0,001
			Total	781	1

YÖS: Examination for International Students for Higher Education Programs in Turkey

YÇS: Higher Education Entrance Examination for the children of workers abroad

YTB Scholarship: Scholarship for students from Turkic Republics and Relative Communities

Age distribution of international students who were actively registered in Van Yüzüncü Yıl University showed differences. According to departments and programs students registered, the registered students were generally of middle age groups and 73% of them were male. Average of age distribution was 28. In terms of registration types of international students, there were also differences. As shown in the graphic, 44.3% of them were registered through institutes, and 26.8% of them were registered through the examination for international students (YÖS) All 199 students registered through the scholarship for students from Turkic Republics and relative communities (YTB Scholarship) were Syrian. The fact that the highest number of registration was through institutes was the most concrete indicator that the international students generally preferred master's degree and PhD programs.

There are international students from 17 countries in total in Van Yüzüncü Yıl University. Most of these students are from neighboring countries (Table 3). 79% of them are from Iraq and Syria. 40,5% of them are from Iraq, and 38,5% of them are from Syria. 13 of them reported their marital status as married.

Eight of these students were registered through the institute, and all of them are male.

The distribution of students according to faculties/programs shows that there were international students registered in almost all of the institutes, faculties, and vocational high schools (Table 4). Students generally preferred vocations they could easily be employed when they return their countries.

“Guest Students Club” affiliated to the Head of Health, Culture and Sports.

23 of the students registered in the Department of Natural and Applied Sciences were in the master’s degree program of Chemistry Engineering, 19 of them were in Department of Mathematics, 14 of them were in the Department of Mechanical Engineering, 12 of them were in the Department of Electric-electronics, and 9 of them were in the Department of Statistics.

Table 3 Distribution of international students according to their nationality

Nationality	Number	Percentage	Nationality	Number	Percentage
US	1	0,001	Iran	42	0,054
Afghanistan	4	0,005	Kazakhstan	1	0,001
Germany	7	0,009	Kenya	2	0,003
Azerbaijan	25	0,032	Libya	4	0,005
Bulgaria	1	0,001	Egypt	5	0,006
Palestine	26	0,033	Syria	301	0,385
South Korea	6	0,008	Turkmenistan	32	0,041
Iraq	317	0.406	Jordan	6	0,008
England	1	0,001			

Table 4 The distribution of international students according to programs

Faculty	n	%	Faculty	n	%
1 Faculty of dentistry	33	0,042	12 Özalp Vocational School of Higher Education	5	0,006
2 Faculty of pharmacy	28	0,036	13 Graduate School of Medical Sciences	35	0,045
3 Faculty of Literature	40	0,051	14 Graduate School of Social Sciences	132	0,169
4 Graduate School of Educational Sciences	31	0,040	15 Faculty of aquaculture	1	0,001
5 Faculty of Education	46	0,059	16 Faculty of Medicine	69	0,088
6 Erciş Vocational School of Higher Education	1	0,001	17 Van Vocational School of Higher Education	4	0,005
7 Graduate School of Natural and Applied Sciences	132	0,169	18 Van Health Care Services Vocational School of Higher Education	5	0,006
8 Faculty of Natural and Applied Sciences	14	0,018	19 Van Health Care Services School of Higher Education	25	0,032
9 Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences	49	0,063	20 Faculty of Veterinary	6	0,008
10 Faculty of Religious Studies	24	0,031	21 Graduate School of Living Languages	42	0,054
11 Faculty of Engineering and Architecture	50	0,064	22 Faculty of Agriculture	9	0,012
			Total	781	1,000

As the Figure 4 shows, registered students generally preferred departments and programs on technical, vocational and professional skills. The highest number of international students with 69 students was found in the Faculty of Medicine. There were 132 students in the Institutes of Natural and Applied Sciences and Social Sciences. Van Health Services Vocational High School ranked the first with 25 students. Registered students were interested in social sciences program in addition to the natural sciences programs. There was considerable number of students in the Faculties of Education, Literature and Economics and Administrative Science.

The most striking details about the registered international students are from Iranian students. 67% of the registered 42 Iranian students studied in pharmacy, medicine, dentistry and nursery care programs which are not accredited in their country. However, these students can register for lateral transfer to universities in Iran which give accreditation after they register Van Yüzüncü Yıl University. Of 199 students entitled to register through the scholarship for students from Turkic Republics and relative communities, 113 were male, and 86 were female. International students studying in Van Yüzüncü Yıl University have an official student club named

The Department of School of Physical Education and Sports and Department of Music were departments with the highest number of students in the Educational Sciences Department, with 13 students and 12 students, respectively. In the graduate school of Social Sciences, there were 51 students registered in Basic Islamic Sciences, 23 students in English Language and Literature, and 11 students in History Department. In the Graduate School of Medical Sciences, there were 18 students registered to various faculties, such as Faculty of Medicine, Medical Biology, Parasitology, Microbiology.

The students attended Turkish language courses at the Van Yüzüncü Yıl University TÖMER language courses functioning under the center of continuing education. International students qualified to register master’s degree educational programs had compulsory Turkish language courses in periods of 3+3 months. A total of 23 students benefitted from the opportunities of scientific research projects in 2015-2017.

As the distribution of international students according to faculties show, Engineering, Economics and Administrative Sciences, Education and Literature faculties ranked first. Out of 50 students in the Faculty of Engineering, 38 of them were male, 12 of them were female. 49% of 49 students registered in the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration were

male, and 51% of them were female. 22% of students registered in the Faculty of Education were male, 78% of them were female. 63% of students registered in the Faculty of Literature were male, 37% of them were female.

Qualitative findings of the research: In this section, the results of the focus group survey findings from 10 international students (five male and five female) were analyzed. The surveyor completed the surveys in four sessions in specific days and times of the week arranged. The male and female students were selected from different countries depending on the numerical weight of the group as follows: Iraq, Syria, Azerbaijan, and Palestine. Since most of the students who participated in this research had taken Turkish classes before, there were no problems with communication in Turkish, and yet the help of a translator was needed to communicate with an Arab female student. The interviews started with semi-structured interview questions, everybody participated voluntarily.

- c) Problems due to the inefficiency of Turkish language courses in TÖMER
- d) Problems due to the inefficiency of adviser help
- e) Problems due to the inefficiency of orientation and organization services

Language and communication related problems were ranked as the most important problems students faced. All the students expressed that they had Turkish language courses before or during their education at the university. Although students participated in Turkish language courses in Language Preparation Centers (TÖMER) after registering to the university and were able to communicate more easily in their daily lives, they highlighted that the level of language courses was not adequate for them to be able to understand the courses and prepare the projects. The most important obstacle the students faced during their education was the inadequate level of their Turkish to participate in the classes. International students' problem regarding insufficient Turkish language knowledge had a negative influence on their regular class

Table 5 The ratio of international students in the Faculties of Education, Literature, Economics and Administrative Sciences, and Engineering

Faculty of Education		Faculty of Literature		Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences		Faculty of Engineering	
Program	N	Program	N	Program	N	Program	N
Department of Computer and Instructional Technologies	9	Anthropology	2	Economics	26	Electric-electronics Engineering	10
Biology Education Program	1	Archaeology	2	Business administration	13	Food Engineering	9
Elementary Mathematics Education	6	Geography	4	Public Administration	10	Civil engineering	12
English Language Teaching	1	English Language and Literature	6			Geology Engineering	3
Chemistry Teaching	1	History of Arts	1			Chemistry Engineering	2
Mathematics Teaching	1	Sociology	6			Mechanical Engineering	5
Pres-school Education	10	History	10			Architecture	9
Primary School Teaching	10	Turkish Language and Literature	9				
Social Sciences Education Program	2						
History Teaching Program	2						
Turkish Language and Literature Education Program	1						
Turkish Language Teaching Education Program	2						
Total	46		40		49		50

The focus group sessions were held in a free environment with the moderation of the surveyor. The surveyor sometimes interfered with the proceedings and guided the students to enable full understanding and obtaining reliable data by creating a discussion milieu. The sessions were held on a trust basis and in an informal environment, thus helping the participants to answer the survey questions sincerely. It has been observed that the students sometimes agreed upon various topics and exhibited similar manners. As a considerable amount of data was gathered in a short period and the issues were discussed, the sessions were completed efficiently. The results gathered from the focus group sessions revealed the problems international students face were classified under five main themes. These problems students encountered were as follows:

- a) Problems due to the use of Turkish language as the medium of instruction
- b) Problems due to the use of Turkish language as the medium of presentations and post-graduate theses

attendance and participation, and the preparation of homework and theses as indicated above. The students complained that although they tried to participate in the classes willingly, they were unable to perform actively in the cognitive and performative processes of education like understanding, comprehending, analyzing, participating, expressing an opinion and analyzing the courses due to their lack of Turkish language skills. With an insightful description the student K.T (24), who was in the Department of Literature, from Iraq stated, "I have come here with great hopes. I was thinking of getting a degree in the shortest possible time and return. Now, I am thinking of how many more years my education would last. I have completed both levels of Turkish language classes. Yes, I can do my own shopping, walk in the city center and ask questions to people and reply back. However, I cannot understand the classes. The language of the classes involves too much detail in technical terms."

In the group session, the question of what kinds of strategies/solutions the students utilized to cope with the

hardships of Turkish language in the classes was raised. Science student E.W (22) from Syria responded showing his enthusiasm to learn Turkish: "I am always trying to talk to myself in Turkish. Even when I am walking down the street or standing on a bus, when I am alone, I always try to talk Turkish. In the city center, I ask people questions to encourage myself to speak Turkish." Medical student A.M. (27) from Palestine explained his strategy for coping with language problems: "I used to attend classes regularly at the beginning. However, the language in the classes is too technical and scientific. When I see that I did not understand anything, I started to get bored and started skipping classes. Now I do not attend classes regularly, and because of this reason my education will last longer."

The surveyor interfered with the sessions to bring the issue up for more discussion and guide the students towards offering solutions for the problems of language and communication. Except for the student from Azerbaijan, all other students from Iraq, Syria, Iran, and Palestine agreed on a single solution to remedy the situation. According to them, another education program has to be offered to international students. In this program, the education should be given either in their own native language or English. The Azerbaijani literature faculty-student M.S. (29) rejected this idea and diverted from the group opinion saying that it was very natural that the education language in Turkey is Turkish.

The international students also complained about the problem of writing their theses in Turkish as an obligation in addition to the already stated problems arising from the usage of Turkish language in the classes. According to them, it was impossible to make presentations and especially write a thesis with a limited command of the Turkish language. Student in the Department of Economy M.F (32) from Iran: "In Persian or Arabic we write from right to left. However Turkish is written from left to right. However, Turkish is written from left to right. This is a big problem for us. Secondly, since we cannot speak Turkish properly and understand the classes, how can we make presentations, give seminars and write our theses in the Turkish language."

The most important detail that had attracted the attention of the surveyor during group sessions is that a response given by any student was generally approved by all other students and that they presented similar opinions. The consensus of all students on any opinion or suggestion and their agreement upon those responses is important not only because it shows the fact that international students face the same problems but also that they are thinking of the same pattern. During sessions, the students complained about lack of English language usage in the university, lack of readings in English and the teachers' lack of proficiency in English. The statements of the student from the Institute of Science C.S (37) from Iraq are important in terms not only the problems they face but also in terms of the qualifications of educational personnel in the universities where the scientific formation should be at the highest level.

"I have come here from Iraq to study Master of Science in the Garden Plants field. I was directed to my adviser for course selection. Since I did not speak Turkish, I spoke English with him. However, my adviser told me that his English was not good enough and thus I felt lost. Then I called my friend who

had previously studied there, and we selected classes with him. Here we cannot speak Turkish, and the teachers cannot speak English. Then how to communicate? Since this is a university, teachers should be able to give classes in English. In Iraq, every student can speak English." The problem raised by the Iraqi student is a very serious problem. He stated that English as a universal language should be used in the university and also underlined the lack of proficiency of teachers in this field. This point is important since it shows that there is a very structural foreign language problem in Turkey, even in the higher education level in the national scale.

Another major problem faced by the international students is the inadequacy of Turkish language courses. In many of the universities of Turkey, Turkish language courses are given by TÖMER as specific Turkish language courses for the international students. In Van Yüzüncü Yıl University Turkish language classes for international students who do not know Turkish are given as well. In focus group sessions all of the international students confirmed that they had attended these classes, but the course was inadequate for their needs. They reached a consensus that these courses are given in couple of months and only a few levels are not enough to have a good command of the Turkish language. The Literature student M.C. (25) from Syria has added valuable information on this topic:

After I had registered the university, I started taking Turkish classes in TÖMER. I attended the classes regularly. However, it was below my expectations. I was not able to learn Turkish. Because they do not give systematic and technical education. They dwell on daily language usages. You cannot teach a language like that. I have searched whether there are other language courses in Van but I couldn't find. I was going to take private classes, but there is no around here." When the surveyor asked what the student's solution to this problem was, the reply was: "I was bored of this situation at first. I did not understand anything from the classes either. I decided to watch Turkish channels on the TV; I always watched the news in Turkish, I called one of my friends to talk to him only in Turkish on the phone. I understood that a language can be learned not only by attending classes but by talking all the time and being in environments that that language is spoken. I speak much better now compared to my early days. I think this is how I accomplished it."

Another major obstacle faced by the students is about advisory guidance. The students informed that they could not maintain an effective communication with their advisers both about course selection and problems about classes and that their advisers did not adequately pay attention to them. The Science Institute student A.S. (34) from Iraq: "In my first day at the university, I went to my adviser to ask him something about the courses. I waited for a very long time. After that, I tried to explain him my problem, but he did not listen and talked with me. He wanted me to come the other day as he was busy. I went to his office the other day, but he evaded saying he had to attend a class and wasn't available at that moment. When I realized that I wouldn't have a chance to see him, I left and never knocked at his door." Another member of the group is Literature student Ö.B (28) from Palestine explained the problem as follows: "Normally we do not know who our advisers are, and nobody tells us [...].The advisers are very

occupied all the time; when we go to their offices, they do not pay attention to us.”

To understand whether the advisers were indifferent towards international students and whether the students had a consensus about this issue, the following question was asked to the all the students who took part in this research: “Is everybody facing the same reaction from advisers, are all advisers are the same?” The Economy Faculty student H.M. (23) from Iraq expressed a different opinion saying: “No, neither myself nor my friends faced such problems. Our advisers are very interested on the contrary. They help us in every possible way. We are very grateful to them.” However, the other group members did not agree with this opinion could be interpreted as an indicator that advisory help was not given adequately and international students often face problems about that. When the surveyor asked the group “What do you do when you face an educational problem, and it is not solved by the adviser?” most of the group members replied that they sought help from the former students who had a good command of Turkish language, and tried to solve their problems.

In the focus group interview, the international students complained about lack of orientation when enrolling at the university and the lack of an official unit to contact when faced with a problem. They also expressed that an office that would provide consultancy service about the education of international students, and campus brochures or documents guiding the students about the campus life would be beneficial. They believed that a good presentation of a huge university campus was important. The students also complained about the lack of an official authority to guide them about the classes. The Iranian student A.B (21) who studied veterinary stated: “After I enrolled at the university, they called me and said that my tuition fee was insufficiently paid and that I have to pay more. I did not know where to go or what to do. I didn’t know the Turkish language either. Then a friend helped and the problem was solved. If there would have been an office I would have consulted there.” In the focus group interview, all the participants also expressed that in spite of every problem stated above, they were very grateful to the helpful attitude of the management of the university, the teachers, the students and the people of Van, who made them feel not as foreigners or guests but at home.

CONCLUSION

Van Yüzüncü Yıl University draws attention through its educational potential and academic milieu and also with scientific research and projects. The university attracts a considerable number of international students from neighboring countries. International students who came to university for higher education encounter a range of problems during their education. This empirical study aims to identify the problems international students encountered, who were registered to Van Yüzüncü Yıl University and also the coping strategies they used to deal with the problems.

In the present research, the findings revealed that the students had language problems since the medium of instruction is Turkish and that Turkish language courses they attended to solve this problem are not sufficient. The students also complained that there is not a robust guidance/information

mechanism in the university, especially in terms of advisory services.

The students reported that there should be an international students office, the courses should be in English, the instructors with good command of English should give the courses, the course registration period should be more than a week, the course registrations should be made manually rather than through a computer-assisted way, an orientation program should be given to the new students, adequate information should be provided about national and international student exchange programs and especially about Erasmus and Bologna, students should be exempt from optical exam forms which they are not used to, a solution or a flexible way should be found about the problem of reverse writing directions of Turkish and Arabic and Farsi, which is from left to right in Turkish and from right to left in Arabic and Farsi. In addition to these demands and criticisms, students expressed that they preferred Van and Van Yüzüncü Yıl University for its geographical and cultural affinity, for the reasonable price of educational expenses, for the high-quality education, and that they are quite content with the sincere and friendly attitude of the administration and instructors.

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