

Non-Linguistic Challenges for Turkish Students in  
American Higher Education

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## **Abstract**

International students who mainstream into American colleges and universities face complex and varied linguistic, cultural and sociolinguistic challenges. Although the number of Turkish students enrolling in American institutions continues to increase, little research has focused on their academic experience from the perspective of the cultural and sociolinguistic difficulties they encounter. By surveying 58 Turkish students attending undergraduate and graduate programs in 18 different American colleges and universities, information about differences between their Turkish and U.S educational experience begins to emerge. Among these differences are expectations for the content of academic lectures; the common practice of establishing academic study groups in the U.S.; the format and content of exams, and attitudes and perceptions toward plagiarism. This paper identifies and describes these differences and then provides possible implications for consideration by ESL instructors, international students and professors, and administrators in U.S. higher education contexts in order to ease the transition of these students into their new educational environments.

## Introduction

Students of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) who enroll in colleges and universities in the United States face myriad linguistic and non-linguistic challenges. The first, English proficiency is of paramount importance to international students, inasmuch as improving their language skills becomes a priority once they have opted for an American university education. Cultural factors also play a significant role in their academic experience as they transition from English language classrooms to learning environments in which they must compete with native English speakers who are usually products of American educational institutions. A third challenge that may cause difficulties for international students lies in areas in which language and culture overlap. According to Zhao, Kuh, and Carini (2005), “This is not surprising, certainly, as living in a foreign land presents continual challenges to virtually every aspect of one’s personhood” (p.224). One such example is professors’ expectations that students will participate orally during class. According to Jones (2003), international students may find engagement in class discussion difficult because they “lack the confidence to take part in academic discussion where there is fast speech, rapid turn-taking, and complex elaboration of arguments” (as cited by Jones and Schmitt, in *Harwood*, 2010, p.228). The skill sets required for class participation include linguistic and cultural elements. Listening comprehension and speaking are part of a student’s linguistic facilities. Cultural abilities require an understanding and familiarity with American turn-taking practices and the system of argumentation used in U.S. classrooms. Thus, often students need to possess both language and cultural skills in order to engage successfully in the kinds of academic discourse they encounter or that is required of them.

“They may also be used to traditional academic contexts where they are only required to listen and take notes” in class (Jones and Schmitt, in *Harwood*, 2010, p. 228). Again, this aspect of class participation may be influenced, in part, by a preconceived sociocultural idea of appropriate classroom etiquette, coupled with elements of linguistic skill. When considering challenges international students face, it is important to bear in mind language and culture, and a combination of the two.

Recently, Turkish students have come to represent a growing population at U.S. colleges and universities. According to Open Doors, a program supported by the U.S. State Department, in the past five years their numbers have increased nearly eight percent from 11,601 in the 2004/2005 school year, to 12,397 in the 2009/2010 school year (Open Doors, 2010). Turkish students are now the largest European group of college and university students on American campuses (Open Doors, 2010). Some have acquired their understanding of appropriate expectations and classroom practices from their high school experience, while others, who have already attended undergraduate or graduate school in Turkey, hold a fixed perception of what is expected of them by both their professors and their classmates based on their experience in Turkish higher education. In either case, unfamiliarity with American academic culture may make their experience in the U.S. more difficult. This research paper seeks to identify and describe several non-linguistic challenges that Turkish students face upon entering and matriculating in mainstream American academic classes. It will also attempt to propose some ways that students, teachers and institutions might address these challenges in ESOL classrooms in order to contribute to a smoother transition into American academic classes.

A number of factors have sparked an interest in exploring the challenges Turkish students encounter as they mainstream into American institutions. American instructors of

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) are charged with teaching English in the areas of reading, listening, speaking and writing. They work diligently to ensure that their students are able to synthesize these skills in order to obtain adequate and appropriate outcomes. Yet after successfully completing the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) exam and being accepted into universities, Turkish undergraduates and graduates report they are ill-equipped to navigate the rigors and dynamics of their American classes. They may possess sufficient language skills, but are not as confident about other aspects of their academic experience in terms of what is expected of them and what their own expectations are. For example, a common practice in American undergraduate and graduate classes is the formation of study groups by either the professor or by the students themselves. The Turkish educational system is highly competitive and students may not be encouraged to study in groups. It is possible that because Turkish students are reluctant or unprepared to participate in collaborative learning, they may be less successful or come to believe they are less successful in meeting the demands of their professors.

It might also be beneficial to consider these challenges from the perspective of the college and university professors with whom they will study. The American academic community may eagerly embrace the rapid internationalization taking place on college campuses across the United States. However, its members may lack the socio-cultural awareness or skills to welcome non-native speakers of English into their classrooms. I became more aware of the issues during a recent discussion with a political science professor who, during his 50-year career, has taught or is still teaching at such internationally renowned universities as Yale, Columbia and Princeton. When he was questioned about his expectation of students' skills when they first enter his classroom, his initial response was based on linguistic expectations, that students should have strong writing skills

and an ability to read complex and lengthy material in the field. He was then asked “What about participation in class discussions or knowing appropriate classroom etiquette such as turn taking when asking questions?” To this, the well educated, worldly and empathetic professor responded, “That goes without saying.” It was that cultural-centric response that inspired this research, because in the world of global education, nothing goes without saying.

It is the goal of this study to obtain information about the sociocultural and sociolinguistic experience of Turkish students in their new American college and university classrooms. ESOL teachers can then use the data collected as a means to inform various aspects of their teaching including, but not limited to, both curriculum design and materials development. It is also possible that the information obtained from such a study will be useful to U.S. college and university professors and administrators who are unfamiliar with Turkish academic culture and who would like to help support these students in their American academic experience as they try to become an integral part of the student body.

The research questions posed in this study are intended to illuminate the differences between the academic experience of Turkish students in Turkey, and in the United States. They are as follows:

1. To what extent do Turkish students’ perceptions/expectations differ in Turkey and the U.S. regarding their professors’ lectures in terms of content, format and presentation?
2. To what extent do Turkish students’ experiences in the formation of formal (professor assigned) and informal (student organized) study groups differ in Turkey and the U.S.?
3. To what extent do Turkish students experience concerns regarding plagiarism differently in the U.S. than in Turkey?
4. To what extent do Turkish students’ experience test taking differ in Turkey and the U.S. in terms of the methods with which they are required to respond and the types of questions they are expected to answer.

## Literature Review

A review of the literature reveals that in addition to linguistic challenges, international students, who mainstream into U.S. academic institutions, experience a broad range of difficulties that are either nonlinguistic or only partially linguistic. It is not surprising that the most studied group of international students has been students from the Far East, including China, South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Vietnam and Thailand as, according to Open Doors, (2010) students from those countries have represented the largest number of international students attending American colleges and universities for the past 10 years. This year, of the estimated 690,923 international students currently studying in the United States, 35.9 percent are from those countries.

Garner (1989) examines the relationship between culture and second language acquisition in higher education classes based on her experience teaching Indo-Chinese refugees. She uses a recently mainstreamed Vietnamese undergraduate named Tran, to develop a narrative of her findings. In order to appreciate the challenges in his American academic classes, Garner asserts, it is necessary to understand how his religious or philosophical beliefs --the ideas of Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism, as well as the traditions of the Vietnamese education system-- influence his learned and preferred classroom etiquette. Through her interviews, she identifies three significant difficulties faced by the student. The first is an unwillingness to volunteer to speak in the classroom, stemming from Vietnamese “Confucian belief you should venerate the teacher,” and never speak unless spoken to (p.127). This was particularly troubling for him because his professor placed a high premium on class participation and volunteering to speak in class. The second finding she provides is a perception of “scholarship by repetition rather than innovation... The French, who ruled Vietnam from 1883 to 1954, installed their system of education which...stressed memorization rather than critical study” (p. 127). The last is characterized as students’ preference



for limited academic freedom. Because many of the Vietnamese students

attending community and less selective colleges...spent the first decade of their lives in war...the next under Communist rule... [and in] refugee camps...they had no control over where they lived, what they ate, when or where they could move about, ... [which resulted in a ] reluctance to take advantage of opportunities involving autonomous or independent learning (p.128).

Wang, Martin, and Martin (2002) identify and discuss three potential linguistic or partially linguistic challenges faced by students from China, Taiwan, Korea, Japan and Vietnam in American higher education. They use a Chinese doctoral candidate and teaching assistant, Yang, to illustrate their findings. Their first finding is that culture and personal prior knowledge influence how students learn. Specifically, Yang struggled with understanding class content based on what the authors call “appropriate schemata,” the ability to relate what you already know to new knowledge (p.98). The second finding is that the process of education that students learned in their native schools has an effect on their L2 school environment. Examples can be found in differences between the Asian students’ attitudes toward reading and writing and those of their American counterparts. In American classrooms, students are taught to read and write critically. Challenging the written word is an integral part of the American academic literary tradition.

The purpose of Asian writing is to show the beauty of words and expressions. Asian students consider writing to be like painting. ...Yang’s “purpose for reading was to find the correct answers... Asian people respect knowledge, knowledgeable persons, and teachers, and value education highly...they do not challenge their ancestors’ perspectives (p.99).

The clash between reading and writing purposes in previous and current cultures poses classroom difficulties to Asian international students as they struggle to perform appropriately and adequately.

The third difficulty identified in this study is more linguistically oriented. Although Yang successfully passed the TOEFL with a score much higher than required for entrance into American

academic institutions, in her classes she struggled with “rate of speech, accents, and the use of slang” (p.100). While she was able to understand the language she had acquired, she was unfamiliar with its pragmatic application and suffered embarrassment and shame because she was unable to communicate with her classmates.

Hsieh (2007) also considers the importance of the relationship between previous and adopted cultures for Far Eastern international students. She conducted a narrative study using interviews and informal conversations with a Chinese female international student, Li-Ling, in order to investigate why she stays silent in her American classes. Hsieh explains that it has been traditionally held that students of Li-Ling’s background keep silent by choice, based on Chinese cultural influence, and therefore “places the responsibility of their teachers and American classmates in the background” (p.380). However this study discovers that this student’s silence stems from an alternative source. The dominant culture in American society is “Eurocentric...[and Americans tend to]... value the knowledge and cultures of the dominant group as the model for other cultures. [It] attributes a [deficient identity] to those who are unable or unwilling to fit the dominant culture...”(Hsieh, 2007, p. 379) Accordingly, these attitudes held by Li-Ling’s American counterparts lead to her diminished self-perception making her a “victim of the disempowering American higher educational setting” (p. 379).

By synthesizing a number of studies written about Chinese graduate students matriculating in North American universities from 1986-2002, Huang and Brown (2009) describe and classify various differences between the cultural and educational backgrounds of the students and their native speaking counterparts and then examine how these differences affect their academic experience. From their analysis the authors identify four important differences between the Asian students and their native speaking classmates. The first is that students hesitate to participate in

classroom activities because they lack shared interests with other students in their classes. Secondly, the Asian students are unwilling to admit that they do not understand their teachers' instructions or assignments. A third, which relates to Garner's (1989) study, is that because most of the Chinese students were raised in cultures that practiced eastern religions, they are unfamiliar with American concepts of God and Christian values in the classroom. The last is that students lack awareness of appropriate etiquette in the classroom including concerns about tardiness, asking teachers questions and the act of making jokes that they considered "rude and disrespectful" (p.647). The authors also found two less significant differences. Asian students acknowledged inexperience in using such university facilities as computers and libraries. They also expressed discomfort with the teacher-student relationship in U.S classrooms because teacher behavior towards students generally involves humor and varied informal teaching methods while in China; teachers are serious (p.648).

Students identified six aspects of instruction that were different from their Chinese educational experience to which they were unaccustomed:

1. Teachers spend too much time on classroom discussions or awaiting student participation, making the Chinese students' understanding of the academic lectures more difficult.
2. Chinese education emphasizes independent work while U.S. education emphasizes group work.
3. American professors fail to follow the textbook. "In Chinese culture, textbooks have authority over teachers" (Fu, as cited in Huang and Brown, 2009, p. 649).
4. Poorly organized lectures by American teachers negatively influence the Chinese students' comprehension.
5. American professors' fail or are unwilling to summarize the lecture, as opposed to their Chinese counterparts who summarize all lectures.
6. Infrequent use of the blackboard by American professors based on expectations that students will do extensive outside reading and research on their own, they use the blackboard less frequently because of their understanding of a wider breadth of knowledge. The subjects felt that their American professors did not make their expectations explicitly known.

The literature is of course not limited to research on students from the Far East. A number of studies performed over the past 20 years have used mixed student populations to shed light on the myriad challenges experienced by international students mainstreaming into American higher institutions. In 1989, Wan, Chapman and Biggs (1992), selected 689 international graduate students of mixed-origin enrolled in three major U.S. universities in upstate New York, to complete their Survey of Academic Experiences of International Students (SAEIS). To obtain information about students' overall cross-cultural experience, respondents were asked to answer questions about stressfulness, coping resources, social support networks, and cultural distance within selected academic settings. The results of the study indicate that these international students found their experiences extremely stressful. Their reasons include fast-paced interaction between student and professors, heavy academic demands, inadequate access to academic and social support, poorly defined role expectations and students' confusion about the conflict between their previous and current academic experiences.

A decade later, Hanassab and Tidwell (2002) collected data from 640 international undergraduate and graduate students at UCLA who were also from different regions. These students were surveyed in order to assess and compare diverse needs based on demographic and cultural factors considering students' needs and concerns, students' personal changes and students' demographic information. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first contained questions in areas such as academic workload, adjustment to different cultural and social systems and study skills. The second consisted of statements relating to participants' experiences with American customs, as well as awareness of different philosophies, cultures, and ways of life. The last focused on demographic information including nationality, major, and degree objective. Among the findings are that Middle Eastern students have among the highest academic needs,

behind African and Asian students. The study also showed that undergraduate international students had higher needs than the graduate students. The researchers conclude, “entering the higher education environment inherently presents different anxiety ridden transition periods for most students” (p. 319).

In a later study also involving internationally diverse students, Zhao, Kuh and Carini, (2005) focused on the extent to which international students engage in effective educational practices. The authors compared the activities of international undergraduate students with American students in selected areas “that research shows is related to student learning, personal development, and satisfaction with college” (p.211). By collecting data from students at 317 different American colleges and universities, they found that

International first year students surpassed their American counterparts in levels of academic challenge and student faculty interaction. But by their senior year, having become better adapted to their foreign environment, international seniors do not differ from their American counterparts in their patterns of student engagement. (p.223)

In a more recent article about international students in American higher education, Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) found that during the initial transition into mainstream classes, an important challenge was “learning the academic culture, including how to interact with faculty and other students, and different styles of teaching” (p.29). The authors interviewed 15 international undergraduate and graduate students from diverse backgrounds about possible barriers to their adjustment while transitioning into mainstream academic classes. Their specific findings indicate difficulties in developing relationships with advisors and professors, getting used to teaching and curriculum differences such as the expectation for class discussion, and questioning the teacher (p.30).

The same year, Apfelthaler et al. (2007) investigated different attitudes toward learning. Using college and university students from Austria, Germany, Singapore and Thailand, the researchers identified nine important areas of disagreement that are perceived as culturally based. Five consider the relationship between students and teachers. These include student criticism of the professor, the professor's responsibility for student success, equal student-teacher interaction and status level between the two and, cheating allowance on exams and plagiarism in written work. Two, which focus on students' relationships with other students, consist of preferred homogeneity of study groups and a preference toward group study. The last area the authors consider relates to students' expectations of themselves and the way in which they study. The first of these involves students' willingness to learn beyond the required scope and the second asks about student preference for memorization of material. Their study also highlights nine less significant areas of disagreement. The first is the importance of technology. A second area, which parallels a segment of Huang and Brown's (2009) synthesis, is the degree to which students prefer professors who show empathy and accept students' suggestions. Two questions relate to physical layout of the classroom such as a preference for specific types of seating arrangements and the need for personal space in the classroom. Two others ask about exam formatting preference and the use of exams in the grading process. The last four of these include the degree to which students prefer to have in-class discussions on course content, the degree to which students expect their professors to be recognized experts in their area of teaching and the keeping of deadlines as binding.

In an attempt to look at cultural perceptions of academic discourse from several perspectives, Abasi and Graves (2008) conducted research using four graduate students from South America, Asia and Europe, and 15 disciplinary professors teaching at a graduate school in Canada. Instead of

using only formal surveys and interviews, this methodology included interviews, classroom observations, text analysis, and evaluations of course syllabi, field notes, and institutional documents. Their goal was to explore how plagiarism policies influence the professor-student relationship and student text production for international students. Among their findings was that the complexity of issues surrounding plagiarism could be attributed to sociocultural relations suggesting that students' perceptions of plagiarism

might have to do with students' culturally shaped life trajectories (Abasi, Akbari, & Graves, 2006; Cadman, 1997; Sherman, 1992), their outsider status relative to their prospective discourse communities (Ange' lil-Carter, 2000; Chandrasoma, Thompson, 2005; Valentine, 2006), or their racial and social positioning excluding them from the rules and conventions of school literacy practices (Hull & Rose, 1989; Starfield, 2002) (as cited in Abasi and Graves, 2008, p. 222).

Another article considered for the development of this present study describes a cross-cultural investigation of students' perceptions toward pedagogical tools. Mahrous and Ahmed (2009) surveyed 461 undergraduate students from business administration courses in the U.S., the U.K. and three countries in the Middle East to understand student perceptions of the learning process using specific teaching tools. Their findings show a significant contrast between Middle Eastern and Western teaching practices. Public institutions in the Middle East rely solely on lectures, rote learning, reading from textbooks, dictation and illustrating concepts. For Middle Eastern students, assessment relies strictly on exams that depend on memorizing facts and not on applying concepts (p.291). Their western counterparts, on the other hand, view education as having many more options for teaching. Results of further studies indicate that U.S students found videos, guest speakers, role playing, diaries and field trips more effective teaching tools whereas in the Middle East, lectures, lecture outlines and handouts are the preferred methods of instruction.

Middle Eastern students tend not to focus on academic reading because they rely on instructors to summarize all the required readings. Overall the study shows “conclusively that students from each country [collectively] have their own opinions on the impact of various teaching tools on learning outcomes” (p.301).

The literature about the Turkish student experience in American higher education is noticeably deficient. Cagiltay and Bichelmeyer (2000) conducted a qualitative study exploring the impact of culture on learning styles to consider the differences of learning styles between Turkish and American graduate students. They interviewed, videotaped, and audiotaped five graduate students, three from Turkey and two from the U.S., attending a midwestern university. The researchers established that “major contrasting aspects of the two cultures was evident in the participants conversations about the main characteristics of their culture” (p.10). Among the differences were Turkish students’ focus on teacher-centered learning, the importance of the family in Turkish society, and the prevalence of students’ working independently. This last element is attributed to the fact that “the system is generally based on rote learning [and] students can pass by simply memorizing, without interpreting and without working in groups” (p.12). The researchers agreed that their participant group was small and much more research could be done to better understand the relationship between culture and learning and how different students are affected.

Five years later, Tatar (2005) reported that in 2004, Turkish students ranked eighth, representing “2% of all the international student population in the United States...[yet]...few studies ...[had] looked at the experiences of Turkish students studying at U.S. universities” (p.338). Her qualitative study about Turkish students’ perceptions of oral class participation in graduate courses at a U.S. university used interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations and collected class syllabi and presentation handouts. . Several factors emerged “such as the role of prior



educational experiences and native culture academic conventions” (p.349). Tatar explains that the perception of no or limited oral class participation, by faculty and institutions, stems from several factors. The first is that students may be silently engaged in classroom activities although they do not speak, and are therefore perceived as not participating. Secondly, students are more willing to interact when they feel the discussions are useful “when structured in a way that embraces diverse perspectives and gives both native and nonnative students equal opportunities to participate” (p.350). The study also finds that the Turkish students’ demonstrate an interest in participating in class discussions when the professors’ reading assignments are the topic of the discussion. A fourth significant factor is that students are less concerned with the “frequency of their oral contribution ...[than they are with being]...acknowledged by their instructors and peers” (p.351). A general observation that Tatar makes is that “the participants were sometimes confused about what was expected of them as graduate students” (p.350).

Tatar’s 2005 article was seminal in that no other study had explicitly focused on these kinds of non-linguistic or partially linguistic challenges for Turkish university students in the United States. Since then, however, several studies have focused on Turkish students. Duru and Poyrazli (2007) conducted an on-line study of 229 Turkish international students studying in 17 American universities to explore how students’ personality, demographics, English language competency and social connectedness contributed to levels of acculturative stress in their academic lives. Two years later, Bektas, Demir and Bowden (2009) studied the acculturation of Turkish university students in North America by investigating how acculturation factors affect their psychological adaptation. They surveyed 130 Turkish students to investigate their levels of self-esteem and their means of social support. Their findings showed that Turkish students “having been in the U.S. educational

system can assist new students entering it. ...[And]...students with higher self-esteem were more psychologically adapted” (p.139).

That same year, Yildirim (2009) surveyed 53 Turkish undergraduates studying in the Environmental and Civil Engineering dual diploma programs at the University of Buffalo to understand their adjustment problems. Eighteen of the same students also participated in follow up interviews. The research addressed a wide variety of difficulties including English language deficiency and concerns about adaptation based on the programmatic protocol of having students spend alternate years in the U.S. and in Turkey. Most germane to the present study was Yildirim’s investigation of the academic cultural elements that affected the students through his survey, the “Inventory of Student Adjustment Problems” (p. 96). Students were asked to rate a variety of problems they had encountered since their arrival in the U.S. Among the results were that students reported unfamiliarity with teaching methods, and professors’ requirements and expectations. They also described a significant difference between engineering content in Turkish classes and American classes. Other challenges they faced include an inability to focus on studies, difficulties with class participation, concerns about grades, and characteristics of the relationships between students and teachers. The study determined that Turkish students in the program experience a moderate level of adjustment problems in their new academic and social environments.

From a review of the literature, five categories of non-linguistic challenges faced by international students in higher education emerge as follows:

## **1. Unfamiliarity with Classroom Teaching Methods and Tools**

- Wait time behavior
- Turn-taking
- Volunteering to participate in the classroom
- Note-taking
- Following lecture organization
- Seating arrangement practices
- Taking field trips
- Blackboard use
- Keeping a student diary

## **2. Cultural and Social Challenges with North American Classmates**

- Lack of exposure to popular culture
- Lack of exposure to other cultures
- Influence of personal or prior knowledge
- Perceptions about diversity
- Limited contact with native speaking students
- Nonexistent shared identity
- Lack of shared interests
- Discomfort with establishing study groups
- High levels of competitiveness

## **3. Student Expectations of Professors**

- Reliance on summarization of required reading
- Necessity for educators to follow textbooks

- Professors showing empathy to students
- Students' belief in the professors' expertise

#### **4. Instructor Expectations of Students**

- Appreciation for and familiarity with pair and group work
- Class participation
- Understanding of the rules related to cheating
- Familiarity with rules related specifically to plagiarism
- Innovative rather than rote learning
- Autonomous learning
- Ability to read voluminous and complex reading material
- Students' vocalization of confusion or incomprehension
- Willingness to learn beyond the required scope
- Development of relationships with teachers and advisors
- Knowledge of classroom etiquette related to tardiness and attendance

#### **5. Concerns about Test-Taking**

- Exam style preferences
- Written versus oral exams
- Memorization versus critical thinking requirements
- Student test-taking ability

## **Methodology**

### **Overview**

This study investigated non-linguistic challenges faced by Turkish students while attending American colleges and universities. A 48-question survey was placed on Survey Monkey and students were asked to respond. 58 undergraduate and graduate students from 18 different colleges and universities responded over a one-month period. Results indicate that the Turkish student experience in Turkey is significantly different from their American experience.

### **Survey Development**

In order to conduct this study, one item from each category informed by the literature review was selected for inclusion in a Likert-scaled student survey. The specific selections were made for several reasons. Firstly, they lent themselves to the kind of questionnaire this study sought to administer. Secondly, they were selected based on anecdotal information gathered from the Turkish student population at the Brooklyn College American Language Academy over the past 10 years.

The initial five-page version of the survey was comprised of 80 multiple choice and short answer questions. Each page contained questions about one of the five areas of inquiry addressing Turkish students' Turkish and American academic experience. It was then pilot-tested on two Turkish student volunteers. It took them more than 25 minutes to complete the survey, in part, as they reported, because they were often confused about whether the question to which they were responding was about their Turkish or American experience. Later, after redesigning the test by dividing it into questions about the students' Turkish academic experience first and their American academic experience second, and then eliminating questions the student volunteers suggested were confusing, the survey, (Appendix A) was limited to 48 questions.

The survey is divided into two parts. The first contains eight segmented question areas about students' academic experience in Turkey. The first two ask for background information including students' field of study and level of study completed. The second part has 11 question areas about students' educational experience in the U.S. Questions one through six are designed to elicit background information including the highest level of education completed in Turkey, the students' fields of study both in Turkey and in the U.S, the amount of time studying ESL in the U.S., educational institution in the U.S., and expected date of graduation. Questions three through seven in part one and seven through 11 in part two are designed to parallel one another. For example in part one, section three has six questions relating to students' expectations regarding professors' lectures in terms of content, format and presentation in Turkey. In part seven, section two, the questions are the same except they are asked in terms of the students' U.S. experience. This pattern continues through each of the four question sections including students' expectations of teachers' lectures, students' experience in group-learning, students' experience relating to plagiarism and students experience with test taking. Question 5 asks for students' understanding and experience with plagiarism.

## **Procedure**

On January 31st, the survey went live on Survey Monkey. Turkish students, who were matriculating in American colleges and universities, were requested to visit the site and participate. These students were contacted via various on-line social, academic and business networks. One was a posted announcement on the Turkish-American students' Facebook page. A second was through word-of-mouth requests to former students who were studying or had studied ESOL in the U.S. or who had friends who were matriculating in college or graduate school. A third source for soliciting student participation was a contact list of all Turkish student associations on

college/university campuses across the United States. Although many of the lists were inactive, one Turkish student association officer, at Auburn University, actively recruited survey respondents from his membership. A Turkish PhD student at Rutgers with whom the author shares a mutual friend, also actively persuaded her Turkish classmates to participate in the survey. Lastly, the Educational Attaché to the Turkish Consulate provided information about several universities with significant Turkish student enrollment.

### **Participants**

At the close of the survey, on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 73 students had participated. After eliminating the information for all students who were still studying ESL or who had neglected to complete questions about their current academic experience in the United States, a total of 58 students from 18 different U.S. colleges and universities provided valid responses. Among them, 5 were undergraduate students, 35 were Master's students, 15 were PhD students, 2 listed "other" and 1 did not provide his/her current university. Because gender was not a consideration for this survey, the gender diversity in respondents is unknown. Most participants were engineering students in Turkey and continue to study engineering in U.S. universities, however, the responses also include students learning in a wide range of fields including the natural and social sciences, humanities and business studies.

## **Data Analysis**

In order to analyze the data for research question #1, “To what extent do Turkish students’ expectations differ in Turkey and the U.S. regarding their professors’ lectures in terms of content, format and presentation?” the following pairs were established from the six segments of Part 1, questions 3 and Part 2, question 7.

### **Pair #1**

Did professors discuss information appearing in required reading in lectures?

Do professors discuss information appearing in required reading in lectures?

### **Pair #2**

Did you EXPECT professors to discuss information appearing in required reading in lectures?

Do you EXPECT professors to discuss information appearing in required reading in lectures?

### **Pair #3**

Did the professors summarize required reading in lectures?

Do the professors summarize required reading in lectures?

### **Pair #4**

Did you EXPECT professors to summarize required reading in lectures?

Do you EXPECT professors to summarize required reading in lectures?

### **Pair #5**

Did your professors use the blackboard to show material for the lesson taught?

Do your professors use the blackboard to show material for the lesson taught?

### **Pair #6**

Did you expect professors to write all or most material on the blackboard for the lesson?

Do you expect professors to write all or most material on the blackboard for the lesson?



Each response in the Likert scale was given a numerical value as follows:

**Never = 1    Sometimes =2    Often = 3    Usually = 4    Almost always = 5**

From this information, using SSPS, the mean and standard deviation for each was calculated. A pair sampled t-Test was conducted on the data for each pair to determine statistical significance.

To analyze the data for research question #2, “To what extent do Turkish students’ experiences in the formation of formal (professor assigned) and informal (student organized) study groups differ in Turkey and the U.S.?” the following pairs were established from the three segments of Part 1, question 4 and Part 2, question 8.

**Pair #7**

Did you form informal study groups?

Do you form informal study groups?

**Pair #8**

Did the professors group you formally?

Do the professors group you formally?

**Pair #9**

Did you EXPECT professors to group you?

Do you EXPECT professors to group you?

Each response in the Likert scale was given a numerical value as follows:

**Never = 1    Sometimes =2    Often = 3    Usually = 4    Almost always = 5**

To analyze the data for research question #3, “To what extent do Turkish students experience concerns regarding plagiarism differently in the U.S. than in Turkey?” the following pairs were established from the six segments of Part 1, question 5 and Part 2, question 9.

**Pair #10**

Did professors discuss plagiarism?

Have professors discussed plagiarism?

**Pair #11**

Was plagiarism defined?

Has plagiarism been defined?

**Pair #12**

Were you given guidelines for how to cite your sources?

Have you been given guidelines for how to cite your sources?

**Pair #13**

Was there a distinction made between copying directly from text and paraphrasing from text?

Has there been a distinction made between copying directly from text and paraphrasing from text?

**Pair #14**

Did you need to cite the source if you did not copy the words directly from the source?

Do you need to cite the source if you do not copy the words directly from the source?

**Pair #15**

Was there a penalty for copying a writer's work in your own text without citing the source?

Is there a penalty for copying a writer's in your own text without citing a source?

**Pair #16**

Was there a penalty for paraphrasing a writer's work in your own text without citing the source?

Is there a penalty for paraphrasing a writer's work in your own text without citing the source?

Each response in the Likert scale was given a numerical value as follows:

**Never = 1      Maybe, but I don't remember =2      Yes, very clearly = 3**

To analyze the data for research question #4, "To what extent do Turkish students' experience test taking differ in Turkey and the U.S. in terms of the methods with which they are required to respond and the types of questions they are expected to answer?", the following pairs were established from the four segments of Part 1, question 6 and Part 2, question 10.

**Pair 17**

Did exams require written response?

Have the exams required written response?

**Pair 18**

Did exams require oral response?

Have exams required oral response?

**Pair 19**

Did professors require memorization?

Do professors require memorization?

**Pair 20**

A "conceptual framework" is a way of thinking about facts that make it clear how those facts are related.

Did professors require you to place the readings and lectures into a conceptual framework?

Have professors required you to place the readings and lectures into a conceptual framework?

Each response in the Likert scale was given a numerical value as follows:

**Rarely = 1      Sometimes =2      Often = 3      Usually = 4      Almost always = 5**

## Results

Table 1 summarizes the results for research question #1 “To what extent do Turkish students’ expectations differ in Turkey and the U.S. regarding their professors’ lectures in terms of content, format and presentation?”

**Table 1**  
*Pair Samples Statistics Group 1*

Question	Mean	Std Dev.	Sig (2-Tailed)
Pair 1 Did profs discuss info appearing in required reading in lectures?	3.26	58	1.07
Do profs discuss info appearing in required reading In lectures?	3.79	58	.99
			.00
Pair 2 Did you expect profs to discuss info appearing in required reading in lectures?	3.61	57	1.05
Do you expect profs to discuss info appearing in required reading in lectures?	3.93	57	.86
			.02
Pair 3 Did profs summarize required reading in lectures?	3.24	58	1.01
Do profs summarize required reading in lectures?	3.40	58	1.14
			.38
Pair 4 Did you expect profs to summarize required reading in lectures?	3.57	58	1.11
Do you expect profs to summarize required reading in lecture?	3.67	58	1.07
			.41
Pair 5 Did profs use the blackboard to show material for lesson taught?	3.50	58	1.24
Do profs use the blackboard to show material for lesson taught?	3.03	58	1.06
			.05
Pair 6 Did you expect profs to write all or most material on blackboard for lesson taught?	3.09	57	1.29
Do you expect profs to write all or most material on blackboard for lesson taught?	3.11	57	1.31
			.93

For Pair #1, the mean value ranges between 3.26 (often) and 3.79 (usually). The result is statistically significant at the p.05 level ( $P=.001$ ). This indicates that Turkish students perceptions are that their professors are more likely to discuss material from their required reading in the U.S. than they were in Turkey. The mean value for Pair #2 ranges between 3.61 (often) and 3.93 (often). The result is statistically significant at the p .05 level ( $P=.017$ ) signifying that Turkish students expect their professors to discuss assigned reading in their lectures in their U.S. classrooms more than they did in Turkey. For Pair #3, the mean value ranges between 3.24(often) and 3.40 (often). The result is not statistically significant at the p.05 level ( $P= .375$ ). According to the respondents, no difference exists between professors' tendencies to summarize required reading in their lectures. For Pair #4, the mean value ranges between 3.57(usually) and 3.67(usually). The result is not statistically significant at the p .05 level ( $P=.410$ ). This result demonstrates that Turkish students do not have different expectations of their Turkish and American professors to summarize the reading in their lectures. For Pair #5, the mean value ranges between 3.50(often/usually) and 3.03(often). The result is statistically significant at the p.05 level ( $P=.046$ ). This signifies that Turkish students perceive that their Turkish professors tended to use the blackboard only slightly more to show material than their American counterparts. For Pair #6, the mean value ranges between 3.09(often) and 3.11(often). The result is not statistically significant at the p.05 level ( $P=.927$ ). This result indicates that Turkish students in Turkey and the U.S. have almost the same expectations for professors' writing their material on the blackboard. Thus, the results of Pairs 1, 2 and 5 are statistically significant.

Table 2 represents the results for research question #2 “ To what extent do Turkish students' experiences in the formation of formal (professor assigned) and informal (student organized) study groups differ in Turkey and the U.S.?”

**Table 2**  
*Pair Samples Statistics Group 2*

	Question	Mean	Std Dev.	Sig (2-Tailed)
Pair 7	Did you form informal study groups?	2.69	1.14	.04
	Do you form informal study groups?	3.10	1.20	
Pair 8	Did profs group you formally?	2.36	1.04	.00
	Do profs group you formally?	3.00	1.21	
Pair 9	Did you expect profs to group you?	2.57	1.22	.01
	Do your expect profs to group you?	3.03	1.15	

For Pair #7, the mean value ranges between 2.69 (sometimes/often) and 3.10 (often). The result is statistically significant at the p.05 level (P=.040), indicating that Turkish students perceive a greater likelihood of participating in study groups in the U.S than in Turkey. For Pair #8, the mean value ranges between 2.36 (sometimes) and 3.00 (often). The result is statistically significant at the p.05 level (P=. 040), demonstrating that Turkish students believe they are much more likely to be grouped by their American professors than their professors in Turkey. For Pair #9, the mean value ranges between 2.57 (sometimes/often) and 3.03 (often). The result is statistically significant at the p.05 level (P=. 012). This result implies that Turkish students have a much higher expectation of being grouped with other students by their American professors than they do of their Turkish professors. Thus Pairs 7, 8 and 9 are statistically significant.

Table 3 represents the results for research question #3 “To what extent do Turkish students experience concerns regarding plagiarism differently in the U.S. than in Turkey?”

**Table 3**  
*Pair Samples Statistics Group 3*

	Question	Mean	Std Dev.	Sig (2-Tailed)
Pair 10	Did profs discuss plagiarism?	2.22	58	.68
	Have profs discussed plagiarism?	2.71	58	.62
Pair 11	Was plagiarism defined?	2.16	58	.79
	Has plagiarism been defined?	2.69	58	.63
Pair 12	Were you given guidelines for how to cite your sources?	2.33	58	.71
	Have you been given guidelines for how to cite your sources?	2.74	58	.58
Pair 13	Was there a distinction made btwn copying directly from the text and paraphrasing from the text?	2.45	58	.68
	Has there been a distinction made btwn copying directly from the text and paraphrasing from the text?	2.72	58	.59
Pair 14	Did you need to cite the source if you did not copy the words directly from the source?	2.32	57	.78
	Do you need to cite the source if you do not copy the words directly from the source?	2.81	57	.44
Pair 15	Was there a penalty for copying a writer's work in your own text without citing the source?	2.18	57	.78
	Is there a penalty for copying a writer's work in your own text without citing the source?	2.84	57	.46
Pair 16	Was there a penalty for paraphrasing a writer's work in your own text without citing the source?	2.00	58	.77
	Is there a penalty for paraphrasing a writer's work in your own text without citing the source?	2.78	58	.50

For Pair #10, the mean value ranges between 2.22(Maybe, but I don't remember) and 2.71 (Yes, very clearly). The result is statistically significant at the p.05 level ( $P=.000$ ), indicating that respondents believe their U.S. professors are much more likely to discuss plagiarism than their Turkish professors. For Pair #11, the mean value ranges between 2.16 (Maybe, but I don't remember) and 2.69 (Yes, very clearly). The result is statistically significant at the p.05 level ( $P=.000$ ), signifying that the students believe that the term "plagiarism" was much more likely to be defined for them in the U.S. than in Turkey. For Pair #12, the mean value ranges between 2.33 (Maybe, but I don't remember) and 2.74 (Yes, very clearly). Results are statistically significant at the p.05 level ( $P=.010$ ), indicating that students perceive that citation guidelines have been given to them more in the U.S. than in Turkey. For Pair #13, the mean value ranges between 2.45 (Maybe, but I don't remember) and 2.72(Yes, very clearly). The result is statistically significant at the p.05 level ( $P=.000$ ), indicating that the respondents think their U.S. professors make greater distinctions between paraphrasing and copying from the text than their Turkish professors. For Pair #14, the mean value ranges between 2.32(Maybe, but I don't remember) and 2.81 (Yes, very clearly). The result is statistically significant at the p.05 level ( $P=.000$ ). This indicates that Turkish students believe that in the U.S. it is far more important to cite the text, even if they are not copying directly from it than they do in Turkey. For Pair #15, the mean value ranges between 2.18 (Maybe, but I don't remember) and 2.84 (Yes, very clearly). The result is statistically significant at the p.05 level ( $P=.000$ ). This response signifies that Turkish students believe there is a greater potential for penalization for copying another writer's work in the U.S. than in Turkey. For Pair #16, the mean value ranges between 2.00(Maybe, but I don't remember) and 2.78 (Yes, very clearly). The result is statistically significant at the p.05 level ( $P=.000$ ), indicating that students believe they would



receive a greater penalty for paraphrasing another writer’s work in their own text in the U.S. than they would in Turkey. Thus, for table 4, Pairs 10-16 are all statistically significant.

Table 4 represents the data for research question #4 “ To what extent do Turkish students’ experiences in test taking differ in Turkey and the U.S. in terms of the methods with which they are required to respond and the types of questions they are expected to answer?”

**Table 4**  
*Pair Samples Statistics Group 4*

Question	Mean	Std Dev.	Sig (2-Tailed)
Pair 17 Did exams require written response?	4.36	58	.99
Have the exams required written response?	4.14	58	1.07
Pair 18 Did exams require oral response?	1.69	58	.94
Have the exams required oral response?	2.12	58	1.26
Pair 19 Did profs require fact memorization?	3.50	58	1.17
Do profs require fact memorization?	2.57	58	1.20
Pair 20 Did profs require critical thinking on exams?	2.88	58	1.09
Have profs required critical thinking on exams?	3.60	58	1.18

For Pair #17, the mean value ranges between 4.36(usually) and 4.14 (usually). The result is not statistically significant at the p.05 level (P= .118). This result indicates that students perceive exams in Turkey to require written response at the same frequency as their U.S. exams do. For Pair #18, the mean value ranges between 1.69 (rarely/sometimes) and 2.12 (sometimes). The result is statistically significant at the p.05 level (P=..008), indicating that respondents perceive exams in the U.S. to require oral response more frequently than Turkish exams. For Pair #19, the mean value ranges between 3.50 (often/usually) to 2.57 (sometimes/often). The result is statistically significant at the p.05 level (P=.000), indicating that respondents believe their Turkish professors require fact

memorization more frequently than their U.S. professors. For the last pair, Pair #20, the mean value ranges between 2.88(sometimes/often) to 3.60 (often/usually). The result is statistically significant at the p.05 level ( $P=.000$ ), indicating that the Turkish students felt their U.S. professors required them to use critical thinking skills on exams more frequently than their Turkish professors. Thus, for Table 5, Pairs 18, 19 and 20 are all statistically significant.

### **Summary of Findings**

In response to the first research question, “To what extent do Turkish students’ perceptions/expectations differ in Turkey and the in U.S. regarding their professors’ lectures in content, format and presentation?” the findings are mixed. Turkish students perceive their Turkish and American class lectures differently in terms of the professors’ inclusion of required reading, their own expectations for what should be included and how professors use the blackboard to show materials for their lessons on the board. Their perceptions of professors’ summarization, expectation of summarization and expectation of blackboard use to show all or most material for the lesson, on the other hand, do not differ significantly.

For the second research question, “To what extent do Turkish students experiences in the formation of formal (professor assigned) and informal (student organized) study groups differ in Turkey and the U.S.?” the results are consistent. The students reported forming formal and informal study groups less frequently in Turkey than in the U.S. and they anticipated forming study groups less frequently in Turkey than in the U.S.

Results for the third research question, “To what extent do Turkish students experience concerns regarding plagiarism differently in the U.S. than in Turkey?” are also consistent. Respondents believe that professors discussed, defined, and gave guidelines for plagiarism more frequently in the U.S. than in Turkey. They also believe that professors in the U.S. distinguish

between copying and paraphrasing more than in Turkey. Lastly, they reported knowing that the penalty for copying and paraphrasing was greater in the U.S. than in Turkey.

For the last research question, “To what extent do Turkish students’ experience test taking differ in Turkey and in the U.S. in terms of the methods with which they are required to respond and the types of questions they are expected to answer?” the responses were consistent in that the Turkish students perceived that they had oral exams more frequently in the U.S. than in Turkey and written exams more frequently in Turkey than in the U.S. In terms of the kinds of questions they were required to answer on exams, in Turkey, they had to memorize more often and in the U.S. they were required to use critical thinking skills more often.

### **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to investigate differences between Turkish students’ academic experience in Turkey and in the U.S. in terms of several non-linguistic factors. Previous research on the international student experience in American academic classrooms provides insight into some of the challenges students face when transitioning to American higher education. Several of these studies identify and describe areas of difficulty that are specific to the Turkish student population studying in the U.S. Many of the findings of the current study are consistent with existing research, but inconsistencies also exist. For example, the results of the Turkish student survey concur with other research in which international students report experiencing challenges based on U.S. emphasis on group work, infrequency of blackboard use, focus on critical thinking skills rather than memorization for test taking, greater incidence of oral performance on exams, and students’ unfamiliarity with U.S. teaching methods, professors’ expectations and definitions and guidelines governing plagiarism (Cagiltay & Bichelmeyer, 2000; Wang, Martin & Martin, 2002; Apfelthaler et al., 2007; Abasi & Graves, 2008; Huang & Brown, 2009; Mahrous & Ahmed,

2009; Yildirim, 2009). However, contrary to studies indicating that U.S. professors are less likely to summarize their lectures than their international counterparts (Huang & Brown, 2009), the present study indicates that Turkish students' perceptions were that U.S. professors are *more* likely to summarize their lectures than their Turkish counterparts.

One interesting area of inconsistency pertains to what Yildirim (2009) refers to as students' collectivist versus individualistic behavior. He asserts, "Turkish culture is more collectivistic than American culture" (p.149). Accordingly, "coming from a collectivist culture, Turkish students are generally used to studying together and helping each other in understanding and solving academic tasks." (p.150) Yildirim refers to this tendency during his discussion of academic integrity and perceptions of cheating by professors, explaining that when the dual diploma students in his study collaborate on homework, some of their American professors consider it cheating. However, when relating the idea of collectivist behavior to the findings of the current study, the same is not the case as far as the formation of formal and informal study groups. These findings indicate the opposite in that Turkish students are unaccustomed to the common practice of student grouping, both formal and informal, in American higher education.

The results of this study point to several differences Turkish students encounter upon transitioning to American academic life. According to Konyu-Fogel (1993), "the greater the differences among the educational system of the subject's home country relative to the U.S., the more academic adjustment difficulties are experienced by international students" (p.206). It is beyond the scope of this study to consider how these differences play a role in the learning of Turkish students in U.S. academic contexts. Nonetheless, as Tatar (2005) points out, when evaluating the academic experience of international students, one cannot rule out "the role of prior educational experiences [and] native cultural academic conventions" (p.349).

The literature on international student adjustment provides myriad recommendations for assisting international students to transition more smoothly into host country academic cultures. One element that distinguishes these studies is the role assigned to different stakeholders. For example, Zhao, Kuh and Carini (2005) consider the duty of “institutional researchers, assessment teams, and others who share responsibility for monitoring the quality of student life... [ and urges them to ask questions such as]... ‘do certain types of early socialization activities (e.g., special intensive orientation sessions, summer bridge programs) facilitate a successful transition to study in the United States?’”(pp.224- 225).

To investigate the possible role higher education administrators and professors could play in assisting the successful integration of international students into Western colleges and universities, Rose-Redwood (2010) surveyed 60 international undergraduate and graduate students from 26 different countries attending an East Coast university. Her findings indicate several areas for improvement including encouraging departments to establish social activities between international and American students, incentivizing conversation partnering, and mentoring between the two developing partnering and grouping plans within the classroom to join international and American college students in academic projects (pp. 397 -398).

Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) assign part of the responsibility of easing international student transition to professors suggesting that colleges and universities would benefit by establishing “training program[s] for faculty to learn about the needs and special circumstances of international students ...[so]...professors might help students” in specific areas which they find challenging (p.42). Huang and Brown (2009) also address professors’ responsibility asserting “North American teachers should try to create a better learning environment for culturally different students, and be aware of the challenges faced by... [them. They also emphasize] ...North American teachers... may

need to adjust ...teaching methods in order to make ...lectures more accessible (p.651). Mahrous and Ahmed (2009) propose that professors should choose “teaching tools that optimize the learning experience of [international] students.”(p.303).

Tatar (2005) and Yildirim (2009), both natives of Turkey, consider the role of the students in easing their own transitions. Tatar contends that

Turkish students ...who come to U.S. institutions... should be prepared to face the challenges of adjusting to a new country and new educational culture. Students should look for ways to familiarize themselves with the host culture by attending various social gatherings, which will create opportunities for them to practice language and to observe and respect cultural differences. Students trying to understand the differences between their home culture and the U.S. culture in terms of values, beliefs, and classroom rituals should be willing to adapt their classroom behavior to a certain extent to the requirements of this new academic culture... In addition, prior preparation could be a good way to increase participation (p.352).

Yildirim (2009) describes the pre-departure and arrival orientation programs established by administrators for Turkish dual-degree engineering students he surveyed at SUNY Buffalo. Although he found that students tended to miss these orientations, those who did attend, recommended that in-coming students should go to the international student orientation given upon their arrival in the U.S. because it is informational and helps students meet other international students (p.162).

A number of articles provide recommendations for easing transition that focus on issues of academic writing and academic integrity. Marshall and Garry (2005) conducted a 2005 study using 66 students of non-English speaking background (NESB) and 115 students of English Speaking Background (ESB). Overall, they found that NESB are significantly more likely to engage in plagiarism, and they also sought to find solutions. One suggestion they expressed was the “need to

convey to all of the students more effectively what is meant by plagiarism and how to avoid it...[instead of]...instilling fear [because]...all students would benefit from an improved understanding of how to engage in academic writing and ethical use of information from multiple sources”(pp.33 -34).

Handa and Fallon (2006) conducted research on international students attending an academic development workshop “which was specifically designed to induct and orient international students into the academic expectations of the program of study at a university in Australia.”(p.29) Whereas the orientations described by Yildirim (2009) allowed students to attend voluntarily, and students did not always attend, and the earlier voluntary program at the university where Handa and Fallon conducted their research, also met with poor attendance, the newly established Academic Development Workshop, instituted compulsory attendance. The content of the workshop included “instruction in academic writing and critical analysis [and also] introduced students to plagiarism, with some discussion of its ethical relevance to cheating” (p.34-35). At the completion of the workshop, researchers received feedback from both participating students and the staff who conducted it. Students reported obtaining the most valuable meaningful knowledge about “academic writing, critical thinking and analysis” (p.36), while the faculty reported that students needed to develop writing skills gradually. They concluded their workshop by emphasizing that expecting international students “to produce accomplished written academic texts especially in the first few weeks of their course, when the students are unfamiliar with these skills, might result in unsatisfactory experiences for both students and staff” (p.37).

Much of the literature on transitioning international students suggests that the teaching of academic classroom culture is most effective when addressed in host country classrooms, by host country administrators and educators. Other researchers place the onus on the international students

as they precariously straddle the fence between the cultures of their home and host countries. It is possible that each of these approaches could be effective in mainstreaming the Turkish students to American higher education.

Other research provides an alternative perspective. Kearney (2010) emphasizes the “near-universal recognition based on theory and practice that culture has a role to play in foreign language (FL) curricula and instruction” (p.332) and laments a common attitude that acquisition of culture can only occur in the home countries in which the L2 is spoken. To address this disconnect, she creates culture-learning narratives to address the gap. What she perceives as an important challenge to developing methodologies for teaching culture in the foreign language classroom is “to shift opinions about whether cultural immersion can be achieved in the [FL] classroom setting and to begin fleshing out a range of approaches that might lead to cultural immersion” (p.335).

Furstenberg (2010) further elaborates the idea of focusing on culture and celebrates the increasing melding of culture and language in educational settings, lauding the fact that

‘culture capsules’...are fast disappearing ...[and]...culture is no longer viewed simply as pieces of factual information to be presented or explained by the teacher but as a process that will allow language learners to develop not just knowledge about the other culture but a close understanding of how culture permeates and shapes the behaviors and interactions of people (p.329).

In 1997, Furstenberg and several colleagues at MIT developed a course, *Cultura*, in which students from France and the United States, “working at a common pace, exchange[d] their cultural perspectives” in on-line forums (p.330). This collaborative learning environment, she asserts, “reverse[s] the usual equation between language and culture, raising a new question...’What is the place of language in such a culture-based course?’ [To which she responds] ...students ...express themselves in their ‘native’ language “(p.331).



Imagining the challenges Turkish students face when mainstreaming into American academic culture through the lens of Kearney (2010) and Furstenberg's (2010) proposals, one can envision application of these ideas to Turkish student education *before* they leave their native country and culture. Since all the students in this current study had studied English in Turkey (from 1- 6 years) prior to their arrival in the U.S., it is not unlikely that they were exposed to a modicum of information about English speaking cultures. In addition, by virtue of the fact that American culture is far reaching, Turkish students have most likely been exposed to many aspects of American culture long before they arrive in the United States. But what Kearney (2010) suggests, is that narratives focusing on target culture, in this case, that found in English speaking academic classroom contexts, may further students' understanding and ability to practice the cultural behavior of their host classroom.

Furstenberg's (2010) on-line forum could also be used as a model to advance the Turkish students' academic acculturation. Her program, *Cultura*, was launched in 1996, eight years before the invention of Facebook in 2004. According to Wang (2011), who surveyed 126 American and Taiwanese college students to evaluate the design of cross-cultural online collaboration programs, "Facebook is a good platform for cross-cultural collaboration" (p.247). He found that because students could interact in myriad ways using a variety of Facebook applications, they were able to obtain insight and ideas about each other's lives.

But Facebook serves a number of additional collaborative purposes with a variety of interlocutors. Not only does it enable international students to exchange through on-line collaboration with host country nationals, it also provides students with opportunities to collaborate with fellow nationals who are studying in institutions which they might consider attending. According to Jonathan Bowker, the founder of the recently formed Turkish Students Facebook

Page, his service offers a “central point of communication for Turkish Students all over the world ... and offers an unparalleled global reach” (Bowker, 2011, p.1). Given this vast network, it is not inconceivable that Turkish students living abroad could assist as mentors demystifying what they perceive as the cultural challenges they themselves have experienced in academic classrooms of their host countries.

The timing is right for such innovative, culture-sharing opportunities. In March, 2011, the Turkish government announced its deep commitment to augmenting the role of English language and English language teaching and learning in Turkey. According to *Today's Zaman*, (March, 2011), in an initiative that will cost the Turkish government the equivalent of USD \$95 million, over the next four years, the Turkish Ministry of Education will bring in 40,000 native English speaking teachers to train Turkish teachers of English. In English classes, native English-speaking teachers will accompany Turkish teachers and hold speaking classes for both the students and the Turkish teachers of English. In addition to preparing Computer Access (CALL) centers in schools, 1,000 English teachers will be hired from the U.S. for distance learning as the first phase of this plan. If the curriculum for this new initiative is developed with an eye toward teaching academic and social culture, as well as language, Turkish students can arrive in the U.S. with a better understanding and perhaps ability to hurdle the challenges their current counterparts face in U.S. institutions.

Although Montgomery (2010) asserts that “as part of the process of acknowledging the complexity of learning cultures, it is useful to focus on the similarities between... educational backgrounds” (p.124), as the results of this research indicate, not only is it valuable to reflect on the differences of educational background from that of the host country and culture, but also to acknowledge the differences between educational backgrounds within the international student

populations. “International students are transient visitors to our academic communities, yet they form an integral part of the social, cultural and academic context of higher education in ...the U.S. “(Montgomery, 2010, p.xi). Among the ranks of the international student group, the Turkish student population continues to increase. It is in the best interest of all stakeholders involved in their adjustment and education to understand the challenges they face and to assist them to address these challenges in effective ways.

### **Limitations of the study**

This study sought to discover specific challenges Turkish students face when mainstreaming to American higher education institutions. In order to identify these difficulties, it focused on one element from each of the five areas of non-linguistic challenge. It was limited to the study of the differences between the students’ educational experiences in Turkey and the U.S. Several areas presented significant challenge including unfamiliarity with the practice of forming study groups, professors’ lecture methods and formats, the composition and format of exams, as well as confusion about issues relating to plagiarism. Four possible areas for further exploration that may provide a wider perspective on these students might be: 1) What are the effects of these differences on the academic performance of Turkish students? 2) How does their perception of these differences change as their time in U.S. institutions lengthens? 3) How do the experiences of native speaking students differ from those of Turkish students? 4) Do the US. professors of the Turkish students recognize discrepancies between the academic cultures of the Turkish students and their American counterparts? Each of these questions might provide information that would paint a clearer picture of the Turkish student experience in the United States.

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## Appendix A

# Turkish Student Survey

1.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this survey. Your responses will remain strictly confidential. If there are questions you do not choose to answer, simply go on to the next question. PLEASE ONLY COMPLETE THIS SURVEY ONE TIME.

Please answer the following questions about your educational experience in TURKEY.

### 1. Please select only one answer.

	Completed High School	Completed College/University	Completed Graduate School
What is the highest level of study you completed in Turkey?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### 2. What was your field of study or major?

### 3. Please rate the following questions about your classroom experience in Turkey.

	never	sometimes	often	usually	almost always
Did professors DISCUSS information appearing in your required reading in their lectures?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Did you expect professors to DISCUSS information appearing in your required reading in their lectures?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Did professors SUMMARIZE required reading in their lectures?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Did you expect professors to SUMMARIZE the required reading in their lectures?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Did professors use the blackboard to show material from the lesson being taught?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Did you EXPECT professors to write ALL or most of the material on the blackboard for the lesson being taught?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### 4. Please rate the following questions about your experience in Turkey.

	never	sometimes	usually	often	almost always
Did you form informal groups with your classmates outside the classroom to collaborate on learning course material?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Did your professors group you formally with other students to collaborate on assigned class projects?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Did you EXPECT your professors to group you with other students to collaborate on class projects?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### 5. Please rate the following questions about your experience in Turkey.

	never	maybe, but I don't remember	yes, very clearly
Did your professors discuss plagiarism with you?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Was plagiarism defined for you?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Were you given specific guidelines for how to cite your sources?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

# Turkish Student Survey

## 6. Please rate the following questions about your experience in Turkey.

	yes, definitely	maybe, but I don't remember	no
Was there a distinction made between copying directly from the text and paraphrasing from the text?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Did you need to cite the source if you did not use the words exactly as they appeared in the text?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Was there a penalty for copying the work of a writer in your own text without citing the source?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Was there a penalty for paraphrasing the work of a writer in your own text without citing a source?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## 7. Please rate the following questions about your experience in Turkey.

	rarely	sometimes	often	usually	almost always
Did the exams you took require written responses?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Did the exams you took require oral responses?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Did professors require you to memorize facts?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A "conceptual framework" is a way of thinking about facts that make it clear how those facts are related. Did professors REQUIRE you to place the readings and lectures into a conceptual framework?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## 8. Please select only one answer for this question.

	1 -2 years	2 - 4 years	4-6 years	more than 6 years
How long did you study English in Turkey?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## 2. In the United States

Please answer the following questions about your experience in the United States.

### 1. Please provide the name of the educational institution which you currently attend in the United States.

### 2. Please answer this question only if you attended ESL classes in the United States?

	3-6 months	6-12 months	12-18 months	18 - 24months	More than 2 years
For how long did you attend ESL classes in the United States?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

### 3. Please provide only one answer

	Undergraduate degree	Master's Degree	PhD	Other
Are you currently studying for your:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



# Turkish Student Survey

## 4. Please provide only one answer.

	3-6 months	6-12 months	12- 18 months	18 -24 months	More than 2 years
How long have you been studying toward this degree in this institution?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## 5. Date you expect to graduate:

## 6. Field of study or major:

## 7. Please rate the following questions about your experience in the United States.

	never	sometimes	often	usually	almost always
Do your professors discuss the information appearing in your required reading in their lectures?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you EXPECT your professors to discuss the information appearing in your required reading in their lectures?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do your professors SUMMARIZE material from the required reading in the lectures?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you expect professors to SUMMARIZE material from the required reading in their lectures?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do professors use the blackboard to show material from the lesson being taught?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you EXPECT professors to write ALL or most of the material on the blackboard for the lesson being taught?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## 8. Please rate the following questions about your experience in the United States.

	never	sometimes	usually	often	almost always
Do you form informal groups with your classmates outside the classroom to collaborate on learning course material?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do your professors group you formally with other students to collaborate on assigned class projects?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you EXPECT your professors to group you with other students to collaborate on class projects?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## 9. Please rate the following questions about your experience in the United States.

	never	maybe, but I don't remember	yes, very clearly
Have your professors discussed plagiarism with you?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Has plagiarism been defined for you?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Were you given specific guidelines for how to cite your sources?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

# Turkish Student Survey

## 10. Please rate the following questions about your experience in the United States.

	never	maybe, but I don't remember	yes, very clearly
Has a distinction been made between copying directly from the text and paraphrasing from the text?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do you need to cite the source if you do not copy the words directly from the source?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is there a penalty for copying the work of a writer in your own text without citing the source?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Is there a penalty for paraphrasing the work of a writer in your own text without citing the source?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## 11. Please rate the following questions about your experience in the United States.

	rarely	sometimes	often	usually	almost always
Have the exams you have taken required written responses?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have the exams you have taken required oral responses?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Do your professors require you to memorize facts for exams?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A "conceptual framework" is a way of thinking about facts that make it clear how those facts are related. Have professors in your American classrooms required you to place the readings and lectures into a conceptual framework?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

