EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE AND POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM: PROBLEMS, EXPECTATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS[1]

BİRLEŞİK KRALLIK'TAKİ ULUSLARARASI LİSANSÜSTÜ ÖĞRENCİLERİNİN DENEYİMLERİ: SORUN, BEKLENTİ VE ÖNERİLER

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to define the problems, expectations and suggestions of graduate and postgraduate international students at a state university in Newcastle upon Tyne, the United Kingdom (henceforth UK). Internationalization has recently become the trend and a major component in the current and future graduate education throughout the world. Consequently, studying this area in a country, the UK, which has a long experience of international education will be a considerable contribution to the field. In this study, problems, expectations and suggestions for solutions mentioned by international students studying at a state university in Newcastle upon Tyne are examined. This is a qualitative and descriptive survey research. For data collection, snowball sampling method is used. The sample consists of 21 voluntary students studying at a state university in Newcastle upon Tyne in the academic year of 2014-2015. A semi-structured interview form adapted from a previous study (Koçyiğit and Erdem, 2015) by the researchers is used as the data collection tool. Eight questions are directed to the sample group. The questions are prepared in English. Descriptive analysis method is used for data analysis. The findings of this study have implications for internationalization in developing countries, understanding the internationalization of education, the

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[1] This study was first presented at ICPESS 2017 conference under the title "Experiences of International Graduate and Postgraduate Students in the United Kingdom: The Problems, Expectations and Suggestions of University Students", 19-22 May, 2017 Sarajevo-BOSNIA.

expectations of students doing graduate and postgraduate studies and the effect of the facilities in a city on university choices.

Keywords: Internationalization in Higher Education, International students, The United Kingdom, Experiences, Problems

Öz

Araştırmanın amacı bir Birleşik Krallık üniversitesinde öğrenim görmekte olan uluslararası öğrencilerin sorun ve beklentilerini ve varsa önerilerini tespit edebilmektir. Uluslararasılaşma son yıllarda bütün dünyada günümüzdeki ve gelecekteki lisans üstü eğitimin temel bir unsuru ve eğilimi haline gelmiştir. Bu açıdan, uluslararası eğitim alanında oldukça uzun süreli bir deneyimi olan Birleşik Krallık'ta bu konuda araştırma yapmak, bu konuyla ilgili temel meseleleri ve konunun şu anki durumunu anlamaya yardımcı olarak alana katkı sağlayacaktır. Bu çalışmada Newcastle upon Tyne'da bir devlet üniversitesinde lisansüstü eğitim alan uluslararası öğrencilerin beklentileri, sorunları ve çözüm önerileri değerlendirilmiştir. Bu araştırma nitel ve betimsel bir saha taramasıdır. Araştırmada örneklem seçiminde kartopu örnekleme yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Kartopu örnekleme yöntemi nitel araştırmalarda kullanılan bir yöntemdir.

2014-2015 akademik yılında Newcastle upon Tyne'da bir devlet üniversitesinde öğrenim görmekte olan ve gönüllü olarak araştırmaya katılan 21 uluslararası öğrenci araştırmanın örneklemini oluşturmaktadır. Araştırmada veri toplama aracı olarak yarı yapılandırılmış bir görüşme formu kullanılmıştır. Örnekleme 8 soru yöneltilmiştir. Sorular İngilizce olarak hazırlanmıştır ve verileri analiz etmek için betimsel analiz yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Her bir soru ilk olarak kendi içinde değerlendirilmiş daha sonra ise sonuçlar kısmında sorunların tespiti ve öneriler sunmak için toplu bir şekilde değerlendirilmiştir. Bu araştırmanın sonuçları gelişmekte olan ülkeler için tavsiyeler, eğitimin küreselleşmesi, öğrencilerin lisans sonrası eğitimden beklentileri ve şehirlerin özelliklerinin üniversite seçimi üzerinde etkisi hakkında tespitler ve öneriler sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yüksek Öğrenimde Uluslararasılaşma, Uluslararası Öğrenciler, Birleşik Krallık, Deneyimler, Problemler

INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Changes in technology, communication, population and social structures have deeply affected higher education as in other fields. Higher education, which has been in a process of restructuring lately, is directly related to the main dynamics of economy, which requires internationalization in higher education since this process has revealed the necessity of the mutual and regional cooperation of countries (Erdoğan, 2014: 1). Actually, there is a mutual relationship. Not only social and economic internationalization have affected education but also education has affected internationalization itself (Kirp, 2003; Kireçci et al. 2016). Internationalization of education at the tertiary level, which aims to facilitate the movement and exchange of knowledge, students and professors and promote international study experience, has become one of the fastest growing developments recently (Pike, 2012). Internationalization can be found in institutional mission statements, policies of higher education institutions besides national policy frameworks (Knight, 2011) and it has become a priority at the highest strategic level of higher education institutions (Reid et al. 2010). Today, higher education is no longer limited to single countries; on the contrary, it has been a global activity through which higher education systems of different countries across the world have become compatible (Cevher, 2016). Internationalization process in higher education is expected to continue at a rapid pace all over the world and therefore, internationalization is an indispensable process for the today and

future of higher education in Turkey (Çetinsaya, 2014; Kireçci et al. 2016).

Though internationalization of higher education has become a significant and popular issue, it is becoming a more confusing and misunderstood concept (Knight, 2011). For many higher education institutions, internationalization activities include recruitment of students from other countries, delivery of programs to students in other countries via branch campuses, franchise arrangements with collaborating institutions (Pike, 2012), research related activities, activities related to technical assistance, extracurricular activities (Knight & de Wit, 1995), foreign language programs (Altbach & Knight, 2007), and exchange of professors and big business of recruitment (Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011). As international activities of higher education institutions have increased in volume, scope and complexity recently (Altbach & Knight, 2007), it is of high significance to define internationalization and determine its scope and content. In addition to the internationalization of their students in their institutions, higher education institutions also need to internationalize their curriculum and courses; however, the effects of this process are obscure (Turpin et al. 2002: 327). Moreover, while internationalization of higher education is a vital theme in discussions on higher education and politics, it is mostly addressed from politic, economic and institutional perspectives in both national and institutional levels in various countries (Svensson & Wihlborg, 2010: 596).

The term 'internationalization' has actually been used for centuries, but it has been popular in education sector since the early 1980s. Before this term, international education was favoured (Knight, 2003). International education can be simply defined as a student's studying in a foreign country (Şimşek & Bakır, 2016). However, internationalization is a much more encompassing term. Knight

and de Wit defined internationalization as the process of integrating an international/ intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of the institution (de Wit, 1999). Knight's (2008: 21) updated definition of internationalization encapsulates all related activities as follows:

"*Internationalization at the national/sector/institutional levels is the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions, or delivery of higher education at the institutional and national levels.*"

According to these definitions, internationalization is a process and includes both international and local elements and this perspective protects the term from being reduced to just a few related activities such as academic mobility or study abroad (de Wit, 1999). In addition, the term process means internationalization is an ongoing effort; the term integration refers to adoption of international and intercultural dimensions into existing local dimensions of institutions; the terms international, intercultural and global reflect the breadth of internationalization (Knight, 2008: 21-22). Therefore, this definition reflects the comprehensive nature of internationalization of higher education.

Internationalization of higher education is mostly discussed with respect to the flow of people, money, products or service with political or economic aims within the context of globalization (Svensson & Wihlborg, 2010: 596). However, the aims of internationalization in higher education in practice include (Sheppard & Bellis, 2008: 101): a) internationalize the students experience, b) enhance employment opportunities for students via international experience, c) develop the international dimension of the curriculum and d) increase global competitiveness through international partnerships, networks, collaboration. It can be argued that these aims and similar aims designate the

implications of internationalization of higher education in practice. Forms of internationalization in higher education include student mobility, teaching staff exchange programs, internationalization of curricula, branch campuses, institutional cooperation agreements and networks, mutual recognition agreements, transnational university networks (including mergers of institutions), transnational virtual provision of higher education (van Damme, 2001). Among these forms, mobility is the most visible version of internationalization of higher education. In fact, Erdoğan (2013) claims that internationalization and other new mechanisms in higher education have emerged to meet the need of mobility which is defined as short or long term movement of students, teaching staff or administrators from a higher education institution to a different higher education institution. Particularly student mobility is the most frequently employed indicator for internationalization and has become more widespread than ever (Aba, 2013: 100). For students, long term mobility means a student's getting education in a foreign country to earn a degree or diploma and short term mobility means a student's getting education in a foreign country for a short time ranging from a month to a year and including that to her/his education in the country of her/his own (Çetinsaya, 2014: 159).

According to OECD (2014: 336-352), the term "international students" refers to *those students who left their country of origin and moved to another country for the purpose of study* and they are not permanent or usual residents of their country of study. International students form the human capital that contribute to economic growth and international competition of a country and they are valuable sources for a country's economy with respect to tuition fees and money spent on accommodation, travel and study besides their cultural contributions as a form of foreign policy and public diplomacy (Özoğlu et al. 2012). Çetinsaya's (2014) report on internationaliza-

tion of higher education reveals that there is a significant rise in student mobility in the recent years and student mobility is encouraged by all countries. Accordingly, the report reveals that the number of students going to foreign countries has exceeded 4 million and increased by more than four times in the last forty years. While the number of these students was around 800 thousand, it reached 4.1 million in 2010. Higher education specialists expect the continuation of this rise and this number will have reached 8 million by 2025. On the other hand, international students study in the countries of the biggest economies in the world and in OECD countries. The most preferred countries are in north America and Europe. Nearly 3 million students study in these countries (Çetinsaya, 2014).

INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE UK

The UK has a long history of international education and it has one of the highest number of international students in the world. There have been many studies on internationalization in higher education (see the sections above), but this paper will specifically focus on graduate and postgraduate students. Accordingly, in the next paragraphs, first general information on internationalization of higher education in the UK will be provided shortly focusing on graduate and postgraduate students in the UK. Finally, the current situation at a state university in Newcastle upon Tyne, where the data of this study is collected, will be introduced.

The UK has a long history of international education and especially after the prime minister's initiative between 2000 and 2005, the government has focused on the recruitment of international students and global marketing campaigns (Conlon et al. 2011; DTZ, 2011). In turn, the number of international students in higher education in the UK has gained momentum and the UK has been the second country after the United States with regard to global market share of interna-

tional students in higher education. Compared to 60s when international students in UK universities was just over 20,000, thanks to this momentum, the number of international students in the British universities has almost reached 500.000 (HESA, 2012). The UK has a 13% share of the international students globally and it welcomes students from nearly all the countries in the world. The top five countries sending international students to the UK are China, India, Nigeria, The United States and Germany, which make up around 50% of the total number of international students in higher education in the UK (OECD, 2014).

While international students make up only 11% of the total number of undergraduate students in the UK higher education, they make up around 45% of the postgraduate students (British Council, 2012). This means that postgraduate students have a big share in the total number of international students in higher education in the UK. Therefore, it may be suggested here that most of the international students have their undergraduate degrees in their home countries and they prefer to do postgraduate studies in the UK.

The context of this study, the state university in Newcastle upon Tyne, is also well-known for its international atmosphere and it welcomes many international students from dozens of different countries. It is ranked in top 1% universities in the world and it also has an overall ranking of top 20 in the UK (Times Higher Education, 2017). The university ranked the third in English major (e.g. linguistics) which most of the participants in this study attend to. This means that the university is well-known for its education style and thus it has good reputation all over the world.

INTERNATIONALIZATION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES: THE CASE OF TURKEY

The number of international students in Turkey is quite low when compared to the leading countries such as the USA, the UK and Australia. The average of international students is about 8 % in OECD countries while it is only 1.9 % in Turkey (Şimşek & Bakır, 2016). However, Turkey has been increasing the number of international students it has lately. While the number of international students in Turkey was only 5.378 in 1983, this number rose to 7.661 in 1990, 16.656 in 2000, 43.00 in 2012 and 55.000 in 2014. Despite this continuous rise, the number of international students in Turkey equals to 1% of the total students. This is because of the rapid increase in the number of Turkish students in higher education in the last years. (Çetinsaya, 2014). Even so, the number of international students increased 11 times in 31 years from around 5.000 in 1983 to 55.000 in 2014.

International students come to Turkey through various ways. The most common way is "International Student Selection Exam" (known as YOS in Turkey). The second way is state scholarship provided to the Turkic Republics and Related Communities (e.g. Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan). These students come to Turkey through Turkic and Related Communities Exam. As of 1992, this exam is held in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Tatarstan (Kıroğlu et al. 2010). The third way is the sponsorship of Islamic Development Bank. Finally, there are also short term students coming via Socrates/Erasmus programs and bilateral agreements between universities (Hacettepe University International Students Office, 2014). In 2010 International Student Selection Exam (YOS), which was central and mandatory, was abolished and universities started to establish procedures and principles regarding international students' admission

(Çetinsaya, 2014), which enabled students to attend admission exams in different times (Şimşek & Bakır, 2016). This flexibility provided universities with an increased number of international students (Cevher, 2016). In addition, a project called "Study in Turkey" was carried out in order to attract international students and a web site (http://www.studyinturkey.gov.tr/) informs international students who wish to study in Turkey.

Turkey, as a developing country, needs to possess well-educated workforce that will meet the political and economic needs domestically and the formation of sound social, economic and cultural relations abroad to maintain its role in the future. The increase in the number of international students is highly important in this sense (Özoğlu et al. 2012). There is a strong need for the development of internationalization in higher education and the competition with the leading countries is quite hard. According to the 2015 data of International Consultants for Education and Fairs (ICEF), it is estimated that five million students studied outside of their home countries the previous year (ICEF, 2005). U.S.A., U.K., France, Australia and Germany host nearly half of these students. Russia, Japan, Canada, China and Italy follow these countries. In contrast to these inbound countries, the outbound countries that send their students the most are China, India, Korean Republic, Germany, Saudi Arabia, France, U.S.A., Malaysia, Vietnam and Iran. Turkish international students mostly study in the U.S.A., Germany, Bulgaria, U.K., Austria and Azerbaijan. On the other hand, international students studying in Turkey come from Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Germany, Greece, Afghanistan, Indonesia and Bulgaria respectively which suggests that most of the students coming to Turkey have language, history and culture relations with Turkey (Çetinsaya, 2014; Cevher, 2016).

THE RESEARCH GAP AND THE JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

According to Kondakçı, Broeck and Yıldırım (2008), there are many sides of internationalization process. Literature on the internationalization of higher education consists of macro level analysis; however, micro level studies focusing on the experiences of teaching staff, students and administrators in the internationalization process are also needed (e.g. Knight, 2011). Also, experiences of the leading countries may be useful for the better development of internationalization of higher education in Turkey, as a developing country, which is also a justification for this study.

The research on internationalization in Turkey on international students' experiences mostly focus on students coming from Turkic Republics. Kılıçlar, Sarı & Seçilmiş (2012) examined the effect of problems experienced by students of Turkic Republics in their academic performance and they found that there is not a significant relationship between financial, socio-cultural, orientation and personal problems, and academic performance. Alleberdiyev (2007) studied the adaptation level of students coming from Turkic Republics and found out that their adaptation levels are not affected by factors such as age, father's level of education, perceived academic success, the sufficiency of scholarship and satisfaction level of studying in Turkey. Çelik (2008) compared students coming from Central Asia and Turkish local students with respect to their strategies of dealing with stress. Otrar et al. (2001) examined the relationship between stress sources, dealing styles and mental health of the students coming from Turkic Republics. Kıroğlu et al. (2010) researched socio-cultural and economic problems of international students without limiting it to students from Turkic Republics. Özoğlu et al. (2012) provide a detailed report on international students' problems and solutions for these problems in study published by Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research. Cevher (2016)

researched international students' satisfaction and identified their opinions, suggestions and expectations. This study revealed that some of the negative situations are high cost of accommodation in cities, inadequacy of dorms, complexity of libraries, inadequacy of buildings, lack of international resources in libraries and inadequacy of social activities. Koçyiğit and Erdem (2015) examined the problems, expectations and solutions of international students and found out that financial problems, accommodation, language, curriculum, food, cultural problems and police department-related issues are the main ones.

Although there are various studies in the literature, there is a need for studies dealing with the experience of successful and leading inbound countries with respect to internationalization of higher education. Şeremet (2015) compared England and Turkey's higher education system. He chose England intentionally as England's higher education system is integrated to European Union, to which Turkey wishes to be integrated and also England is a leading country with respect to internationalization indicators when compared to other European countries. This study yields quite useful theoretical data regarding the internationalization process of higher education in England, a part of the UK. However, the justification of the researchers of this study for undertaking this study is that there is also need for empirical data regarding the experiences of international students studying in the UK, which will be fruitful for Turkey's internationalization policies and implications. UK higher education sector is one of the most mature and developed in the world and as higher education is the most important export owner, internalization has become a priority for UK universities (Worton, 2012; see also section 2.2). Therefore, the successful instance in the UK has the potential to provide implications for developing countries such as Turkey. In this study, the aim is to identify the problems, expectations and suggestions for solutions of international students who are studying in the UK. This will not only fill the research gap by presenting the perspective of international students, but this study will also identify suggestions and implications for developing countries which are in a fast progress of internationalization as discussed above. To this end, a state university in the UK is chosen for data collection which is found to be the 88th most international university in the world according to Times Higher Education's the most international university rankings (Times Higher Education, 2016).

Aim of the Study and the Research Questions

The aim of this study is to define the problems, expectations and suggestions –if any- of the international students studying in the UK. In this study, the expectations, the problems experienced and the suggestions for solutions of the international students studying in a state university in the UK are addressed. Accordingly, the research questions of this study are as follows:

1. Which factors do the students think are the main reasons for choosing to study at a state university in Newcastle upon Tyne for a graduate or postgraduate study?

2. What are the problems and conveniences the students have experienced?

3. How much of their expectations do the students think are met?

4. Do the students have any suggestions for the problems they have had?

METHODOLOGY
Research Design

This study is a qualitative and descriptive study. The study is designed as a case study. A case study is a strategy of research that aims to understand social phenomena within a single or small number of naturally occurring settings. The purpose may be to gain a detailed understanding of the

processes involved within a setting, provide description through a detailed example or to generate or test theories. Case studies are often described as an exploration of a bounded system (Bloor & Wood, 2006: 27). In order to provide validity and reliability, a semi-structured interview form, which was developed and used before in a similar study (Koçyiğit & Erdem, 2015) was adapted and used. The data was transcribed, and coded by the researchers via crosscheck. Moreover, after the analysis of the data was finished, the results were shared with two of the participants (one Libyan and one Turkish) as a follow up study via e-mail and they were asked to tell whether they generally agreed with the results. They were also asked to add if they had any further ideas or to provide the reasons if there were any points that they did not agree with. These participants stated that they agreed with most of the findings. For instance, the *Turkish* participant indicated that she agreed with the findings summarized considering her experience.

Participants

The participants of the study were chosen through convenience sampling. Convenience sampling involves choosing the nearest individuals as respondents and continuing this process until the required sample size is obtained or those who happen to be available and accessible at the time. Researchers simply choose the sample from those to whom they have easy access. Convenience sampling may be the sampling strategy for a case study or a series of case studies (Cohen et al. 2007).

The participants of the study consist of 21 international students studying at a state university in Newcastle upon Tyne, the UK in the academic year 2015-2016. Seven of the participants are male, and 14 are female. The participants consist of eight Chinese, five Turkish, two Saudi, one Indian, one Bangladeshi, one Greek, one Libyan, one Spanish and one Trinidadian students. 15 of them were studying for master's degree and six for PhD. 12 of the participants were self-sponsored and nine of them were sponsored students.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data was collected through a semi-structured interview form adapted from Koçyiğit & Erdem (2015) and translated into English by the researchers. The participants were asked 8 questions which are:

1. Why have you chosen to be a university student in the UK? Why? Or why didn't

you choose another country other than the UK?

2. What were your expectations when you came to the UK? Have these expectations been met? Which of those expectations have been met and which of them not?

3. Why have you chosen to come to the state university in Newcastle upon Tyne in the UK but not another city? What do you think about Newcastle upon Tyne as a city?

4. Are there any problems (e.g. accommodation, educational, financial and so on) that you have experienced in the UK? If there are, what are these problems? If you were

a student in a different country, do you think you would experience similar problems?

5. What do you think are the reasons of the problems you have mentioned in the 4th question, and what are some possible suggestions/solutions for these problems?

6. Which of the variables like university, accommodation, people, curriculum and course contents, transportation, cultural differences, and financial difficulties etc. have you had problems with? Which ones were the most problematic for you? Could you put these variables in order?

7. What convenience or easiness have you experienced in the UK? Please specify.

8. Is there anything you want to add? You can specify any wishes, suggestions, experiences and so on you have.

In the analysis of the data, descriptive analysis was used. In descriptive analysis, the data is interpreted according to the pre-defined themes or may be grouped and reported according to the research questions. Direct quotations from the respondents are frequently used while reporting the findings. The idea is to interpret and present the data in an organised way (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). The data in this study will be organized, interpreted and presented according to the survey questions.

FINDINGS

In this section the findings will be presented with regard to the survey questions. The students' responses to the eight questions used in the survey will be presented respectively. First, some frequencies of the most typical answers will be mentioned and then, the responses will be described which will be followed by some representative quotations from the data.

➢ **1. Why have you chosen to be a university student in England? Why or why didn't you choose another country other than England?**

The first interview question aims at understanding why the students have preferred an education at a state university in Newcastle upon Tyne. The analysis has shown that almost all the students think that education is better in the UK compared to their home country. Most of them also mention the reputation and quality of the education as the major factors. Therefore, it can be argued that the quality of education in the UK is the major factor for their decision. Another issue is the recommendations of friends and family member. Several students have mentioned that recommendations had an effect on their choices. They also mention the opportunities for English practice and the duration of the programme as significant factors. As English is the native tongue of the UK, students

prefer education in this country because English is an essential part of their career. The duration of education is also important. In the UK, you can complete a master's degree in 1 year and a PhD program in 3 years. These are shorter compared to other countries. (e.g. master's is usually 2 years and PhD is around 4-5 years in Turkey). For instance, in the data the participant *Chinese 5* says: "*Compared with the educational system of China, if I complete my master degree in the UK, I can graduate two years early than those who study in my home country.*" Consequently, it can be argued that shorter duration does not only save them one year, but also it helps the students complete their education and continue their career as soon as possible.

Finally, as *Libyan 19* have summarized: "*There is a clear preference when it comes to employment.*". Quite a number of students believe that having a degree in the UK is a definite advantage in finding a job in their home country.

➢ **2. What were your expectations when you came to the UK? Have these expectations been met? Which of those expectations have been met and which of them not?**

Around two-thirds of the participants suggest that their expectations are mostly met. They are especially happy with having students from different cultures. However, the number of students in classes is a clear trouble pointed out by most participants. For instance, the participant *Saudi 16* have mentioned**:** "*To be honest not all my expectations have been met. An example of this could be the limitation of help offer to me specially during the second term. This due to the large number of students in my fields.*" This problem is faced by many participants and they express their discontent with the lack of feedback and the insufficient time their supervisors allocate to them individually. In addition to the expectations that are met and the ones that are not met, there

are also some points with which some of the participants are content while some others are discontent. The first one is the quality of education. Some participants have pointed out that the quality of education is quite acceptable and up-to-date while some other finds the quality unsatisfactory. These people mainly relate this to the number of students as mentioned above. Hence, it can be argued here that the number of graduate and postgraduate students is a factor that causes serious discontent for the students. The other point is the chances for English practice. Indeed, most of the participants agree that they had some opportunities for practice, but some of them find these opportunities as very scarce. One point they raise is that there are not enough native English speaker students at their programs and they also suggest that they do not have enough opportunities to contact with the local people outside the university.

➢ **3. Why have you chosen to come to Newcastle upon Tyne in the UK but not another city? What do you think about Newcastle upon Tyne as a city?**

In this question the researchers aim to find out the effect of the city on international graduate/postgraduate students' choices. The analysis suggests that around half of the participants considered the city as a significant factor. These participants mentioned that the relatively cheaper living costs in Newcastle and the conveniences in the city (e.g. easy transportation, lively city centre) had an important effect in their university choice. *Trinidad 21* has clearly articulated this as follows: "*I chose this city because the University was well ranked, also the cost of living was far more reasonable than the rest of the UK.*" Consequently, it can be argued here that the city is often a significant factor that affects the choices of the participants in this study.

➢ **4. Are there any problems (e.g. accommodation, educational, financial etc.) that you have experienced in the UK? If there are, what are these problems? If you were a student in a different country, do**
you think you would experience similar problems?

This question aims at finding out the problems the students faced in the UK. Also, this question asks the students if they would experience the problems they faced in the UK in another country. So, the purpose of this question is to find out the problems the student faced and to understand if they think the problems they faced are inherently caused by the UK context or not. The most common problems students mentioned are accommodation and the education system. Several students complained about the lack of sufficient qualified accommodation. As *Libyan 19* points out, students faced significant difficulties as a result of accommodation: "*I couldn't find student accommodation with the university so I had to rent privately … (I suffered with the high rents, bills and the condition of the flat).*".

As for the education system, there are two main problems. Students suggested that lectures are centred on students too much and that they have to do everything on their own. The other problem is that there is not enough face to face feedback and discussion opportunities with the lecturers and supervisors. *Chinese 7* mentions this as follows: "*I did take more time to adjust myself to adapt the new teaching and learning ways here. I think the students from countries with different educational system will encounter the problem I experienced.*". Consequently, it can be suggested here that accommodation and the different education system are the most common and significant problems for the students in this study.

As for the question that asked the students if they would experience the same problems in another country, students overwhelmingly stated that these problems are not peculiar to the UK and that they could have experienced the same problems in another country as well.

➢ **5. What do you think are the reasons of the problems you have mentioned in the 4th question, and what are some possible suggestions/solutions for these problems?**

The fifth question aims at learning the causes of the problems mentioned in question 4 and it also aims to find out if students have any suggestions for the problems. For the accommodation problem, most of the students think that the problem is caused by the insufficient amount of accommodation facilities offered by the university. They further add that the university should at least offer support for finding private accommodation. As for the reasons for the problem caused by the different education system, the students mostly argue that the teaching style of the lecturers is different compared to their home country. As *Chinese 7* points out: "*Most of students such as in China have been used to listening to teachers' lectures passively and don't know how to be critical.*". A number of participants think that the problem with the education system essentially lies in the profit concerns of the university administration. As *Turkish 11* suggests: "*They cannot solve class size for profit issues*". Therefore, it can be argued that the students put the blame on the university for not providing enough accommodation and they also feel that the problem regarding the education system is difficult to solve due to the economic policies of the university.

The participants also offer some solutions for the problems they have experienced. For the accommodation problems, they suggest that the university should offer more and qualified accommodation. For instance, *Libyan 19* suggests that "*There should be a unit in the university that helps students find reasonable flats in safe and good areas.*". For the problem related to the education system, students suggest that there should be some guidance and orientation from the very beginning of the education so that students can adapt and catch up as soon as possible. *Chinese 7* suggests a solution for this problem as follows: "*I think what school can do is to tell students from different countries at the very beginning when they enter the university and guide them to adjust and raise their*

awareness."

➢ **6. Which of the variables like university, accommodation, people, curriculum and course contents, transportation, cultural differences, and financial difficulties etc. have you had problems with? Which ones were the most problematic for you? Could you put these variables in order?**

In this question, the students are asked to put the problems they faced in order. The aim is to understand which problems students see as more important. The analysis suggests that curriculum and course contents is by far the most problematic one. This is followed by cultural differences, people and accommodation. The fact that students put education related issues (i.e. curriculum and course contents) in the first place is coherent with the results in question 4. Cultural differences (e.g. cuisine and the closing time of shops) and people are also mentioned as significant difficulties. *Turkish 13* points out the problem regarding people as follows: "*People are generally fine, but this is usually true in the city centre or around the university where there are educated people. When you start living in poorer areas –as rents are cheaper- it is not very uncommon to experience racist attacks, verbal or even physical.*" Consequently, the problem mentioned as 'people' seems to be related to the issues regarding racism and xenophobia.

➢ **7. What convenience or easiness have you experienced in the UK? Please specify.**

By this question the researchers aim to find out the easiness and conveniences the students have experienced. Three points are frequently mentioned by the students. Two of them are public transportation and library facilities. Students are generally happy with the regularity and extent of the network of public transportation. Library facilities are also much appreciated by the students. As *Chinese 7* states: "*The most convenience for me is the accessible library facilities and resources.*".

The third point they have mentioned as a convenience is the helpful and tolerant university staff and the local people (Geordies in Newcastle). The students are content with the help offered by the university staff and some of the students have also mentioned their sympathy for the local people.

> **8). Is there anything you want to add? You can specify any wishes, suggestions, experiences and so on you have.**

The final question aims at finding out if students would like to add any issues which are not addressed to by the previous questions. Most students did not add further points, but still quite a few of them did. One issue raised a few times is students' depression. As *Chinese 4* mentions: "*Many oversea students would encounter the depression. Hope the university could pay more attention on students' mental health and offer more help.*" This instance shows that some students think that the stress of a graduate degree in addition to the problems faced while adapting to a new environment and culture may bring about psychological problems.

Another issue is high tuition fees and the scarcity of opportunities for sponsorship and part-time jobs. As *Bangladesh 17* puts it: "*The tuition fees are too much high … Moreover, the option for scholarship is also scarce.*". The tuition fees in the UK are indeed really high. It is around 15.000 pounds annually (around 18.000 dollars or 66.000 Turkish liras) for a graduate degree at the university that this study was carried on (Postgraduate Degrees List, 2017). Finally, the number of students in a lecture/class, which is also mentioned as a significant problem in Question 5, is criticized and it is suggested that the number of students should be decreased. This would in turn give way to a better education as there will be more opportunities for individual and face-to-face contact with the supervisors and instructors.

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS AND THE CONCLUSION

This study has set out to unearth the problems, expectations and suggestions of international graduate and postgraduate university students at a state university in the UK. In the Findings section, the reasons why students have chosen to study at the state university in Newcastle upon Tyne, the students' expectations from the university, the problems students have faced and their suggestions for the university has been presented. Accordingly, in the following paragraphs, these findings will be discussed and synthesized with regard to the research questions and the literature. After that, the limitations and future directions will be given.

The first research question has aimed to see the reasons why students have preferred education in the UK at this university. As the findings have shown, the most important factor is the prestige and reputation of education in the UK. As mentioned in section 2, the university this study was carried on has a good reputation worldwide and it is in the top 1% university globally. The fact that reputation is mentioned as the most common reason by the participants shows that it is essential to have a good reputation and promote reputation if universities expect to develop their share of international students. Another reason that has been frequently mentioned is the fact that the UK is the mother land of English and that students have the chance to practice English with local people. Consequently, it may be argued that English-speaking countries have a significant advantage.

Another significant reason for students is the recommendation of friends and acquaintances. As argued by Mazzarol & Soutar, (2002) word of mouth is a really influential factor for students who consider studying abroad. The findings of this study (See the 1st research question in Findings section) supports Mazzarols & Soutar's (2002) study. Consequently, it can be argued here that increasing current international students' satisfaction

will bring about more international students in turn as word of mouth is a significant factor for recruiting prospective international students.

One final frequent reason is the shorter duration of graduate and postgraduate degrees in the UK. As mentioned in Findings section, master's degree can be earned in one year and a PhD can be earned in 3 years in the UK. Shorter duration does not only save students one year, but also it helps the students complete their education and continue their career as soon as possible. In other words, students can achieve a degree 1 year earlier in the UK which means that they significantly cut down on the money and time they sacrifice for a degree. The responses of the participants suggest that this is a significant factor for most of the students. Then, it can be argued that developing countries who plan to promote internationalization in higher education should take this into consideration.

The second research question of this study has aimed to find out the problems and conveniences the students have experienced. Accommodation is by far the most significant problem for the students. This finding is consistent with similar studies (e.g. Koçyiğit & Erdem, 2015). As a natural consequence of being an international student, students are already in a process of adapting to a new environment and culture. The accommodation issue is raised in the responses for the research question 3, too. Several students have mentioned that they have chosen to study at the state university in Newcastle upon Tyne as accommodation price is relatively cheaper than other cities. As the stress of graduate and postgraduate education combined with the difficulties faced because of a new culture and environment at an international university is already very high, students seem to consider a safe and sound accommodation as a must. Thus, it can be deduced here that having a good accommodation is an essential issue for

international students. Therefore, it may be suggested here that universities should either provide good accommodation opportunities or they may establish strong connections with the local estate agencies to provide students with safe and secure accommodation.

Another problem is the tuition fees. As discussed in the Introduction part (e.g. Kirp, 2003; Svensson & Wihlborg, 2010), internationalization of education is highly dependent upon the free trade market. This means that university administrations consider themselves as companies. However, as the findings have demonstrated, students do actually mind the high tuition fees. Consequently, universities should move away from seeing students as 'customers' and offer more reasonable tuition fees. One final significant problem for the students is the different education system. This is a significant issue since master's degree usually lasts only one year in the UK. If students fall behind for even a few weeks, this can cause serious problems for their successful completion of the program. Consequently, the university administration should take into consideration the problems that students may face due to cultural, pedagogical and personal differences. Postgraduate programmes are criticized for not paying enough attention to culturally inclusive pedagogy (Causey et al. 1999) and they usually align with a particular pedagogy (Graybill, 1997). Namely, they do not address deeper pedagogical and practical issues regarding the quality of the learning and teaching process (De Vita et al. 2003). Accordingly, it may be argued that cultural differences in education systems have the potential to pose threats to international education environments as international students may simply have lower achievement rates due to cultural differences.

As for the conveniences, interestingly the most commonly-mentioned convenience is (public) transportation which does not have a direct relationship with education. Consid-

ering the importance of accommodation for students in the previous paragraphs, it can be argued that international students do not have expectations for only education, but also they crave for a comfortable environment where they do not need to deal with issues regarding accommodation or transportation. This finding is a unique finding as it provides insights into the external factors that influence internationalization of education.

The other convenience the students have frequently mentioned is the library facilities. Students are very content with the ease at which they can access books, journals and study places. As graduate studies heavily rely on the access to various books and articles, the accessibility of these facilities have increased the overall experience of students. This is also an implication for universities in developing countries that seek to promote internationalization. As the participants' responses have demonstrated, library facilities are considered as one of the significant issues which has satisfied their needs successfully.

The third research question has aimed to find out the expectations of the students and if these expectations are met or not. Student satisfaction is important for recruiting prospective international students. As suggested by Cevher (2006), it is a really significant factor in university choices. This is also supported by the findings of this study. As the findings have demonstrated, more than two-thirds of the students think that their expectations are mostly met. The most common expectations of the students are an intercultural environment, a satisfactory level of quality in education and opportunities for English practice. Most of the students are happy with the intercultural environment and again more than half of the students are happy with the quality of education and the opportunities for language practice. As has been argued a few times already, the number of students in classrooms is too high and students feel discontent with this. This is partly because too many students mean less indi-

vidual contact with the supervisors and lecturers. This naturally lets the students down as they have expected to have more face-to-face contact and guidance with their supervisors. As for language practice, quite a few students think that they have had enough contact with other students and local people. However, some students have advised the university to create more opportunities for contact with the local people and culture. Consequently, the findings regarding this research question offer the two following insights: In order to meet the expectations of students satisfactorily, universities offering graduate and postgraduate education should prioritize individual feedback and meeting times for students. Also, as graduate studies are more challenging, it must be made sure that students do not feel alone in this journey when they face difficulties.

The final research question has aimed to find out if the students have any solutions or further points to add. This question is important in that it has allowed the students to freely mention whatever they would like to say without restricting themselves to the interview questions. As has been discussed regarding the second research question, accommodation has been one of the most problematic issues at the university they are studying. Naturally, they have mentioned this problem in this part, too and they have suggested the university to provide more accommodation and to help students find good quality accommodation. Additionally, a few students have mentioned students' depression. Due to the combination of the stress of a graduate degree, a new environment and the gloomy weather of Newcastle, students may easily fall into depression. The suggestion of the students is that there should be a better induction in the beginning of the term by which students can familiarize themselves with the new city, university and the culture. This is also in accordance with the findings in literature (Causey et al. 1999; Graybill, 1997; De Vita et al. 2003) in that higher education

institutions usually align their system with a particular pedagogy and cultural stance.

Finally, Koçyiğit & Erdem's (2015) study is worth being discussed here as its focus (problems, expectations and suggestions of international university students) is the same as this study, the only difference being the context: Turkey versus the UK. In their study, the main problems the students faced were economic issues and accommodation. This is in line with this study as accommodation is seen as one of the biggest troubles. Economic issues were also reported as a problem in this study. As demonstrated in Findings section under the third questions (with Trinidad 21's quotation), some students chose the university as the city was reasonable in terms of living costs. Consequently, it can be argued that accommodation and the living costs in the city where the university is located is of utmost importance for international students. As for expectations, the participants in Koçyiğit & Erdem's (2015) study are similar to this study in that they put the reputation of the university/country in the first place. In both studies, students think that the university where they study is more reputable compared to their home country. However, a difference is observed between the two studies, though. The students studying in Turkey expected to earn the degree more easily. This is not mentioned by the students studying in the UK. The reason for this difference may lie in the qualifications the universities require. The university in the UK requires many qualifications such as a certificate of proficiency in English or a high diploma degree; however, the requirements are less strict in Turkey. Therefore, students with relatively less successful backgrounds may tend to choose universities that have less strict requirements in order to avoid failure in their studies.

Shortly, the comparison and contrast of this study and Koçyiğit & Erdem's (2015) study suggest that both groups of students

consider accommodation and living costs as significant factors. However, it may be argued that students' expectation regarding the relative ease or difficulty of earning the degree is also a factor affecting students' choices. The last but not the least, both of the studies suggest that the reputation of the university/country compared to the home country of students is a significant factor that affects students' choices. Consequently, it can be suggested here that universities in Turkey may focus on the Middle Eastern, African and Turkic students to recruit international university students. As Turkey has a relatively better reputation and quality of education compared to these countries, it is more sound for the students from these countries to choose to study at Turkish universities. However, it must also be noted that the universities in Turkey should do their best to avoid being chosen as 'it is easy to earn a degree here' as suggested by some participants in Koçyiğit & Erdem's (2015) study. Accordingly, these universities should also prioritize quality in addition to their objective of recruiting more international students which will increase their reputation in the long run.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The participants of this study are international graduate and postgraduate students at a state university in the UK. For reasons of focus and feasibility, the participants are restricted to a state university in Newcastle upon Tyne context. This was necessary as this study focuses on qualitative analysis, too. It would take a huge time to analyse data from various universities. However, in the future studies, researchers may choose students from different universities and in this way, they can have a sample from various universities which may be a better representation of the whole UK.

The other issue with this study is that

the researchers have focused on graduate and postgraduate international students. Studying international undergraduate students would offer insights into internationalization of higher education as they are also a significant part of internationalization (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Therefore, another study may also look at the international undergraduate students studying at the state university in Newcastle upon Tyne to see whether their experiences are similar or not.

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