


Communication Barriers Experienced by Academicians and International Students During the Education Process and Related Solutions


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Abstract

Objective: In this study, we address the communication barriers between academics and international students using a phenomenological approach. The aim of the study is to examine in depth the communication barriers faced by these two groups in the education process and to develop solutions for these barriers.

Method: The qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews with 42 academics and 50 international students were analyzed using the MAXQDA 20 package program.

Results: In the study, four themes and sub-codes related to these themes were identified: (1) academics' communications problems with international students, (2) solution suggestions for academics' communication problems, (3) international student communication problems, and (4) students' suggestions for improving communication.

Conclusions: The findings show that communication barriers are mostly caused by language barriers, cultural differences, and deficiencies in academic and administrative expectations. Academics reported that language barriers made student engagement and course comprehensibility difficult, while students reported language barriers, lack of cultural awareness, and difficulties in adapting to educational approaches. Differences in academic expectations lead to barriers of mutual understanding and communication for both academics and students.

Implications: Suggestions for solutions include strengthening language development programs, increasing the cultural awareness of academics, and expanding mentoring programs that support the adaptation process of international students. This study draws attention to the need to create a more effective and inclusive communication environment in today's education systems, where international student mobility is increasing. It is of great importance for educational institutions to develop comprehensive strategies to overcome language and cultural barriers and to find solutions to such communication barriers.

Keywords: *communication, communication barriers, international students*

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Introduction

Developments in communication technologies have expanded the spheres of influence of globalization. Additionally, increased internationalization with globalization has affected education and training processes with the increase of international student mobility, which has become a global trend (Lu, 2022). During this expansion, students try to adapt to international accreditation programs, while universities focus on international students who constitute a valuable financial resource and possess a wide range of knowledge and skills (Arkoudis et al., 2019; Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

International students enrich host countries at different levels with their diverse heritage and perspectives through their participation in academic, economic, social, and cultural activities. International student contributions help increase cultural awareness and appreciation (Bevis, 2002; Harrison, 2002; Imai & Imai, 2019). International students have also become an increasingly important subject of research, as they constitute a strategic research area for understanding the global landscape of higher education (Börjesson, 2017). Academic studies on international students continue to increase each day.

International students participate in education mobility with internationalization to receive their higher education at institutions in the countries where they attend school. These students go to different countries for their learning while also gaining many experiences and promising benefits (Sisavath, 2021). Opportunities include exploring a different culture, learning new behaviors and ways of thinking, making new friends, and developing intercultural knowledge and skills (Andrade, 2006; McClure, 2007).

The process of education and training is an interactive and multi-dimensional process between students and academics in education mobility with internationalization. This interaction is of great importance to both groups, making it equally important to both parties to understand any communication problems. International students, for example, may face different problems during their education process, just as some problems are also experienced by academics in the country where they receive their education (at different levels).

When we look at the studies conducted in this field, very few evaluate communication problems. Instead, most are related to the difficulties experienced by international students in relation to English language deficiency and related adaptation problems (Andrade, 2006; Benzie, 2010; Duru & Poyrazli, 2011; He & Chiang, 2016; Nuemaihom et al., 2018; Ravichandran et al., 2017; Sawir et al., 2012; Tan et al., 2018; Thao & Trung, 2022; Yanagi & Baker, 2016). Turkish and international literature have very few studies in the field of communication (Erişti et al., 2018; Kurum & Erdemli, 2021; Okan & Kaçar, 2023; Robertson et al., 2000; Trice, 2003), and these studies largely focus on general problems experienced by international students.

When looking at non-language problem studies, results show that some of the general problems experienced by international students (during the education process) were addressed (Beltekin & Radmard, 2013; Enterieva & Sezgin, 2016; Hellstén & Prescott, 2004; Kiroğlu et al., 2010; Sasa, 2018; Snoubar, 2017; Wu et al., 2015; Yıldırım, 2014). Students' general problems are very important to identify, of course, but communication is a mutual process. For this reason, an important factor in increasing the prestige of

universities and reducing communication problems is academic staff qualifications. The communication of lecturers with international students plays a role in reducing or increasing communication problems.

This study aims to identify communication barriers that academics and international students experience with one another. We want to offer solutions to these barriers based on student and academic experiences, with reference to existing studies. To do this, we consulted the experiences of international students studying at public universities in Turkey and experiences of academics working at these universities.

Literature Review

Intercultural Communication and Its Challenges

Intercultural communication occurs as a result of the interaction of individuals or groups within different cultures; it tries to make sense of the communication, interaction, and experiences between different cultures and members of these cultures. Characterized as an interdisciplinary science, intercultural communication focuses on direct interactions between individuals from different cultural backgrounds and subcultures (Kim, 2005). According to Kartari (2006), intercultural communication deals with issues like interaction and meaning transfer between individuals from different cultures, recognition, and explanation of foreigners and cultural differences. Samovar et al. (2010) used intercultural communication as a form of communication shaped by the processes of producing, transmitting, and interpreting symbols between individuals with different national cultures, while Ting-Toomey and Chung (2012) define intercultural communication as a process of symbolic exchange in which individuals from two or more different cultural communities attempt to negotiate shared meanings in an interactive situation within an embedded social system.

Intercultural communication competence is generally understood as “the knowledge, motivation, and skills to interact effectively and appropriately with members of different cultures” (Wiseman, 2002). As emphasized by Selçuk (2005), individuals who participate in communication will tend to interpret expressions, attitudes, and behaviors according to their own cultural norms and standards unless they understand the communication behaviors of people from a different culture.

The main factor hindering international student communication is the spoken language, according to several studies (Kim et al., 2014; Littlemore et al., 2011; Okan et al., 2024; Sherry et al., 2010; Volkova & Kolesov, 2022), which then makes it difficult for students to understand images, metaphors, and academic and cultural adaptation. God and Zhang (2019, p. 306) found that when two groups interact, they often encounter significant communication difficulties due to language barriers and cultural distance as well. Bekiroğlu and Balcı (2014) found that this situation creates a ground where communication conflicts may arise at any time in the intercultural interaction process. Additionally, Wilczewski and Alon (2023) found that developing intercultural communication increases the ability of individuals to cope with cultural differences in their worldviews. As the number of international students in higher education is increasing worldwide, it is important to develop an understanding of the role of foreign language proficiency and communication in students' adaptation (Wilczewski & Alon, 2023).

Although studies on the problems experienced by international students—besides language barriers—are not related to communication problems, it is understood that the findings and conclusions are related to communication (Diaz & Iqbal, 2024; Przyłęcki, 2018). According to Jing et al. (2020), the number of articles on international students has increased rapidly, especially since 2006, which is largely driven by Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. These countries have published a large number of publications due to their journals and prolific researchers. Researchers reported that the most frequently analyzed topics in these articles are intercultural adjustment, mental health problems, second language acquisition, intercultural development, student migration, social integration, graduate employability, and student satisfaction. In their

bibliographic analysis, Wilczewski and Alon (2023) stated that, to date, no study had specifically examined the role of language and communication in the adaptation of international students—one of the most important factors preventing intercultural communication.

Cultural differences can hinder communication. Incompatibilities of understanding and behavior are brought about by cultural differences, leading with language and communication problems. As an example, when students from different countries communicate with Turkish students or academics, they often face intercultural communication difficulties—if there is no common language. Turkish is the language of education and training in most of the universities in Turkey and, although English is a common language in the world, studies conducted in different countries found that international students still experience language problems (Li et al., 2010; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006; Ralarala et al., 2016; Trice, 2003; Xiao, 2024; Zhang & Brunton, 2007).

Language is the most dominant factor that increases academic performance in studies on language proficiency of international students (Poyrazli et al., 2001; Poyrazli & Kavanaugh, 2006; Trice, 2003; Zhang & Brunton, 2007). Therefore, it is understood that the language factor, which is the most fundamental element of academic achievement, is of primary importance. Intercultural adjustment theories and empirical research confirm the critical importance of developing foreign language and communication skills for academic achievement and social adjustment (Andrade, 2006; Smith & Khawaja, 2011), understanding, and adapting to the host country culture. Additionally, Williams and Johnson (2011) drew attention to students' difficulties in making friends with local people due to hindered communication.

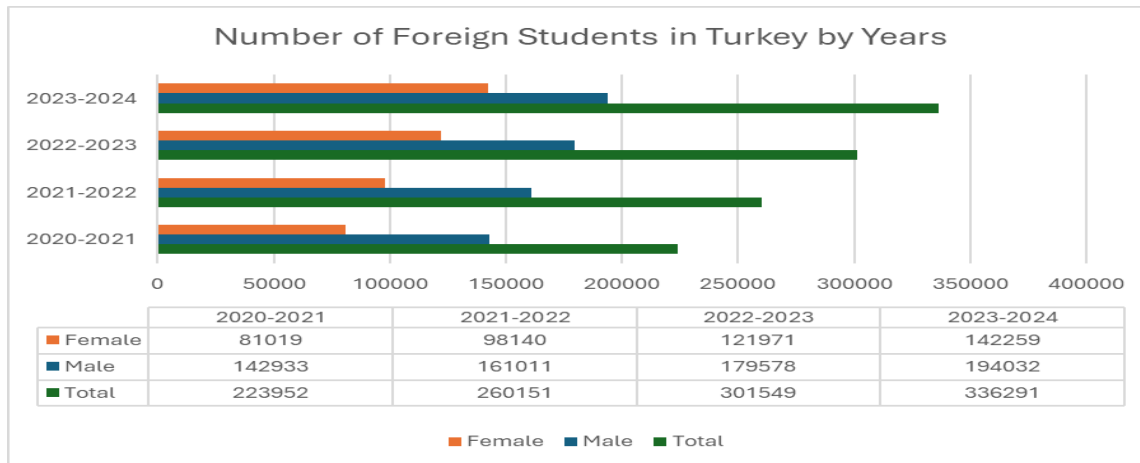
In countries where international students are located, studies have determined that language proficiency has a positive effect on their relations with local people, which affects their mental health, stress, and motivation (Sümer et al., 2008). If students feel uncomfortable communicating, they interact less verbally and culturally (Kim, 2006; Liu, 2001; Mukminin & McMahon, 2013; Xiang, 2017; Xiao, 2024). Academically, language can affect the student's adaptation in the classroom environment, including participation in a lesson, and the ability to ask questions, take notes, write homework, understand lessons, and take oral and written exams (Chen, 1999; Mori, 2000). Therefore, language problems are among the factors that make cultural adaptation difficult and hinder the academic success of international students (Campbell & Li, 2008; Matera et al., 2018; Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

This study aims to determine the communication problems that academics and international students experience with each other, with reference to existing studies. We want to offer solutions to their communication problems based on their own experiences. In doing so, we consulted the experiences of international students studying at different public universities in Turkey, as well as the experiences of academics working at these universities.

International Student Mobility in Turkey

The internationalization movement in education is implemented through various practices, such as Erasmus and European Union projects, scholarship opportunities abroad, and universities accepting international students through different methods, such as exams or diploma grades. This movement increases cultural diversity in the world of education and contributes significantly to student mobility and academic collaborations. The institutional performance and success levels of some universities are evaluated through global rankings, research collaborations, international partnerships, and networks (Jones, 2013). International student mobility, which is one of the effects of globalization, has gained a rapid positive momentum worldwide in recent years. As can be seen in Figure 1, the number of international students in Turkey has significantly increased in the last 4 years.

Figure 1. *Number of Foreign Students in Turkey by Years*



Note: Retrieved from <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/> on July 18, 2024. Prepared by researchers based on this source.

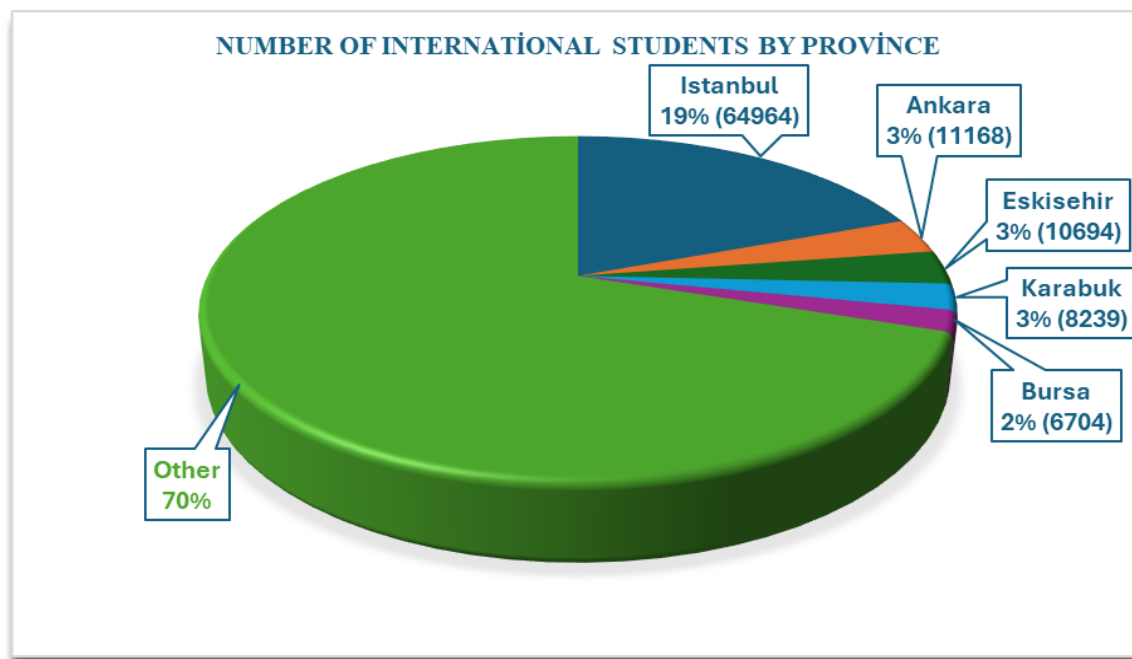
According to data from Yükseköğretim Kurulu (n.d.), foreign students from 198 countries are registered to study in higher education in Turkey in the 2023–2024 academic year. Table 1 presents the numerical information about which countries have the highest number of international students. Although Turkey attracts international students from many countries or regions, when data were analyzed, it showed that Turkey mainly receives international students from countries with close cultural, historical, linguistic, and religious ties (Tekin, 2022). Looking at the 10 countries with the highest number of international students in Turkey (Table 1), the effectiveness of these factors can be seen.

Table 1. Countries With the Most International Students in Turkey

Order	Country	Number of Students
1	Syria	33,183
2	Azerbaijan	27,024
3	Turkmenistan	13,971
4	Iran	12,690
5	Iraq	7,633
6	Jordan	7,145
7	Egypt	7,069
8	Afghanistan	6,539
9	Yemen	6,315
10	Somalia	5,636

Note: Retrieved from <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/> on July 18, 2024. Prepared by researchers based on this source.

Figure 2 shows the number of international students by provinces in the 2023–2024 academic year. Istanbul ranks first with 19% (64,964) of the number of international students.

Figure 2. *Number of International Students by Province*

Note: Retrieved from <https://istatistik.yok.gov.tr/> on July 18, 2024. Prepared by researchers based on this source.

Method

Aim

The aim of this study is to obtain an in-depth understanding of the communication barriers that arise in the educational process of academics in public universities in Turkey and the international students who study in these universities. This study aims to offer solutions to these barriers, including analyzing the difficulties encountered between these two groups, such as language barriers, cultural differences, and harmonization. This study will determine how the experiences of the parties in this process affect the education and learning processes.

Importance

Communication between academics and international students plays a critical role in the effectiveness and efficiency of educational processes. Between these groups, communication barriers have a significant impact on the effectiveness of a quality education and learning process. With the increasing number of international students in the globalizing world, the fact that these students have different languages, educational habits, and cultures can lead to communication difficulties in the academic environment.

This research aims to raise awareness of the need for more inclusive and effective communication in educational settings. To do this, we examined the communication barriers between these two groups in depth. This research will offer suggestions for solving communication barriers, which can help academics to interact more effectively with students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds while also supporting international students' academic success and integration processes. This research is of great importance in terms of overcoming the communication challenges of globalization in education and contributing to the creation of a stronger teaching–learning environment.

Research Design

This research falls within the scope of the phenomenological design since the study aims to reveal the experiences of international students and academics regarding their experienced communication barriers. Creswell and Poth (2016) stated that phenomenological studies reveal different personal experiences about a phenomenon and focus on the perspectives and perceptions toward this phenomenon, including how this phenomenon is interpreted and experienced and how these experiences are described, provided that the phenomenon to be researched is emphasized (Tekindal & Şerife, 2020, pp. 158–159). According to Yıldırım and Şimşek (2018), studies conducted with the phenomenological design generally aim to reveal and interpret personal experiences related to a phenomenon. Considering these phenomenology definitions, this design aims to identify the communication barriers experienced by academics and international students—from their own experiences—and to offer solutions in the education and training process.

Within the scope of the research, we used semi-structured in-depth interviews to collect data from the participants. We selected a sample group consisting of academics and international students and shared their thoughts, feelings, and experiences—based on their own experiences—regarding the communication barriers they have experienced.

Participant data were subjected to content analysis with the help of the MAXQDA 20 package program, and results were obtained. Within the framework of the phenomenological approach, we investigated the common experiences of the participants and the meanings they attribute to these experiences. These experiences provided an in-depth understanding of the origins of communication barriers and solution suggestions.

Working Group

Demographic Information on Academics

We examined data from a total of 42 academics working at universities in Turkey, including 23 men (54.76%) and 19 women (45.24%). Table 2 presents additional information about the participating academics.

Table 2. *Demographic Information on Participant Academics*

Participant #	University of Employment	Academic Title	Gender
A1	Atatürk University	Professor, PhD	Male
A2	Atatürk University	Associate Professor, PhD	Female
A3	Atatürk University	Associate Professor, PhD	Female
A4	Atatürk University	Professor, PhD	Male
A5	Ege University	Associate Professor, PhD	Female
A6	Ege University	Associate Professor, PhD	Female
A7	Ege University	Associate Professor, PhD	Male
A8	Ege University	Research Assistant, PhD	Male
A9	Gaziantep University	Lecturer	Male
A10	Gaziantep University	Associate Professor, PhD	Male
A11	Gaziantep University	Associate Professor, PhD	Female
A12	Gaziantep University	Associate Professor, PhD	Male
A13	Adnan Menderes University	Professor, PhD	Male

A14	Adnan Menderes University	Associate Professor, PhD	Female
A15	Adnan Menderes University	Associate Professor, PhD	Male
A16	Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University	Associate Professor, PhD	Female
A17	Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa University	Associate Professor, PhD	Female
A18	Ondokuz Mayıs University	Associate Professor, PhD	Female
A19	Ondokuz Mayıs University	Associate Professor, PhD	Male
A20	Ondokuz Mayıs University	Associate Professor, PhD	Female
A21	Marmara University	Associate Professor, PhD	Male
A22	Marmara University	Associate Professor, PhD	Female
A23	İstanbul University	Associate Professor, PhD	Male
A24	İstanbul University	Associate Professor, PhD	Male
A25	Hatay Mustafa Kemal University	Associate Professor, PhD	Female
A26	Hatay Mustafa Kemal University	Associate Professor PhD	Male
A27	Hatay Mustafa Kemal University	Associate Professor, PhD	Male
A28	İnönü University	Associate Professor, PhD	Female
A29	İnönü University	Lecturer	Female
A30	Selcuk University	Associate Professor, PhD	Male
A31	Selcuk University	Associate Professor, PhD	Female
A32	Uludağ University	Associate Professor, PhD	Male
A33	Ankara University	Associate Professor, PhD	Male
A34	Harran University	Professor, PhD	Male
A35	Harran University	Professor, PhD	Male
A36	Harran University	Associate Professor, PhD	Female
A37	Harran University	Associate Professor, PhD	Female
A38	Harran University	Associate Professor, PhD	Female
A39	Harran University	Professor, PhD	Male
A40	Harran University	Associate Professor, PhD	Female
A41	Harran University	Associate Professor, PhD	Male
A42	Atatürk University	Associate Professor, PhD	Male

Demographic Information on Students

The data of 50 international students, 25 male (50%) and 25 female (50%), were included in the analyses. Table 3 presents additional student participant information.

Table 3. Demographic Information on Participating International Students

Participant #	University of Study	Country of Origin	Gender
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S1	Ataturk University	Afghanistan	Male
S2	Istanbul University	Afghanistan	Male
S3	Ankara University	Afghanistan	Male
S4	Ataturk University	Katar	Male
S5	Ataturk University	Kazakhstan	Female
S6	Ataturk University	Kazakhstan	Male
S7	İnönü University	Turkmenistan	Female
S8	Istanbul University	Turkmenistan	Female
S9	Ankara University	Turkmenistan	Male
S10	Gaziantep University	Syria	Female
S11	Ege University	Syria	Male
S12	Selcuk University	Syria	Female
S13	Mustafa Kemal University	Syria	Male
S14	Harran University	Syria	Female
S15	Harran University	Syria	Female
S16	Harran University	Syria	Female
S17	Gaziantep University	Syria	Female
S18	Selcuk University	Syria	Female
S19	Uludag University	Syria	Female
S20	Uludag University	Syria	Female
S21	Ege University	Syria	Female
S22	Harran University	Syria	Male
S23	Gaziantep University	Syria	Female
S24	Uludag University	Syria	Female
S25	İnönü University	Syria	Male
S26	Harran University	Syria	Male
S27	Karabuk University	Syria	Female
S28	Ege University	Syria	Female
S29	Ege University	Algeria	Female
S30	Uludag University	Egypt	Female
S31	Ankara University	Egypt	Male
S32	Karabuk University	Somalia	Male
S33	Karabuk University	Somalia	Male
S34	Istanbul University	Iraq	Female

S35	Mustafa Kemal University	Iraq	Male
S36	Van Yüzüncü Yıl University	Iraq	Female
S37	Ankara University	Iraq	Female
S38	Ondokuz Mayıs University	Azerbaijan	Male
S39	Ankara University	Azerbaijan	Male
S40	Istanbul University	Sudan	Male
S41	Selcuk University	Sudan	Male
S42	Akdeniz University	Sudan	Male
S43	Harran University	Sudan	Male
S44	Harran University	Chad	Male
S45	Akdeniz University	Yemen	Male
S46	Uludag University	Tunisia	Female
S47	Istanbul University	Morocco	Female
S48	Ege University	Morocco	Male
S49	Van Yüzüncü Yıl University	İran	Male
S50	Van Yüzüncü Yıl University	İran	Female

Data Collection

For the study, we first obtained permission from the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee on January 19, 2024 (No. 302253). We then obtained consent from the international students and academicians who would participate in the research. After this process, we personally delivered the study interview form to the participants who were easily accessible (taking into account the transportation and interaction status of the participants), and we asked participants who were difficult to reach in person to fill out the form via email and other communication channels.

Within the scope of the study, we collected participant responses to open-ended questions through a semi-structured interview form consisting of two parts. In the first part of the interview, we asked participant students their gender, nationality, and university of study, and we asked academics their gender, university of employment, and academic title. In the second part, and in line with the purpose of the study, we asked international students and academics questions (see Table 4) to enable them to express their views on the communication barriers and to offer solution suggestions.

Table 4. *Open-Ended Questions Directed to International Students and Academics*

	International Students	Academics
Communication Problems	What are the communication problems you experience as international students? Can you tell us about them?	Do any international students take your course? If so, what are the communication problems you experience?

Solution Suggestions	What are your suggestions for solutions to the communication problems you experience?	What are your suggestions for solutions to the communication problems you have experienced?
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Data Analysis

Following the completion of the participant interviews, within the scope of the research, we began data analysis. First, we transferred participant forms that were handwritten to the Microsoft Word environment. We then combined them with the forms that were answered via email. With data reading and writing completed, we transferred data to the MAXQDA 20 package program, where we began the analysis steps using the deductive method.

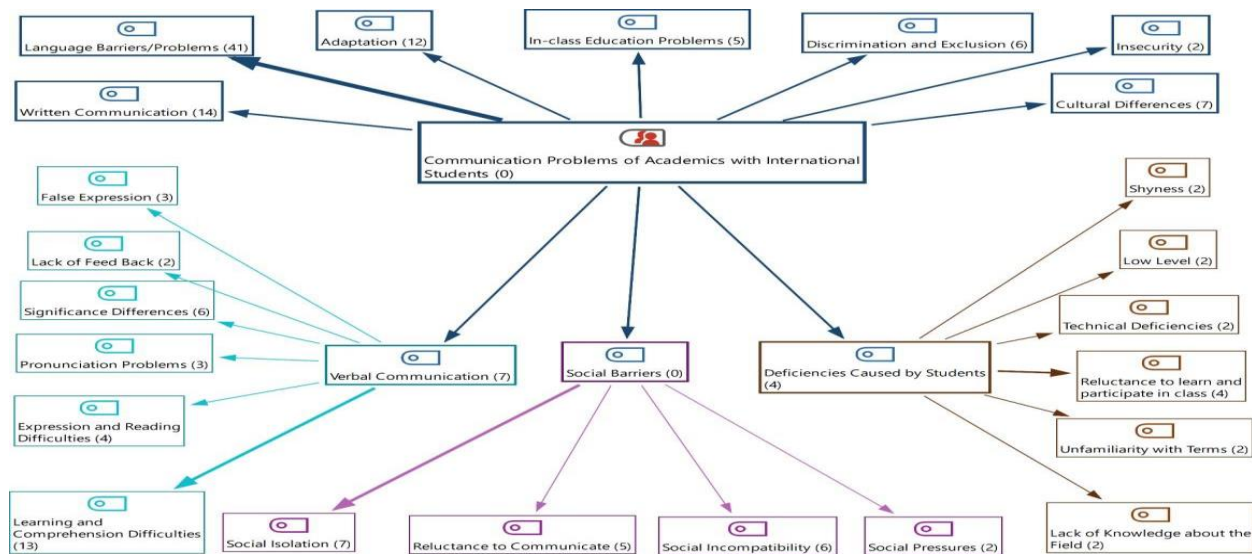
In qualitative research, it is possible to mention steps to guide the researcher in analyses (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). In this study, the data steps included reading the combined text from beginning to end and checking the coding relationships in the literature (Baker & Warren, 2015; Stone et al., 2023; Yağcı & Uçar, 2018). After we determined the necessary notes and general themes, we completed necessary codings. After the coding process, we created maps according to the “hierarchical code-subcode model.” Then, we included the prominent participant responses regarding the created maps using direct quotations. When presenting participants’ findings, we used coding. To maintain participant anonymity, we used S1, S2, S3, etc., for international students and A1, A2, A3, etc., for academics.

Findings

Communication Barriers Experienced by Academicians With International Students and Suggestions for Solutions

We asked academic participant questions “Do any international students take your course?” and “If so, what are the communication barriers you experience?” regarding problems academics experienced with international students. Using academic participant responses, prominent codes that relate to the communication barriers academics experienced with international students are presented in Figure 3. Communication barriers experienced by academics teaching international students are concentrated around codes, such as language barrier, adaptation/accommodation problems, expression difficulties in oral and written expressions, cultural differences, and discrimination.

Figure 3. Codes Related to the Communication Barriers Experienced by Academics With International Students

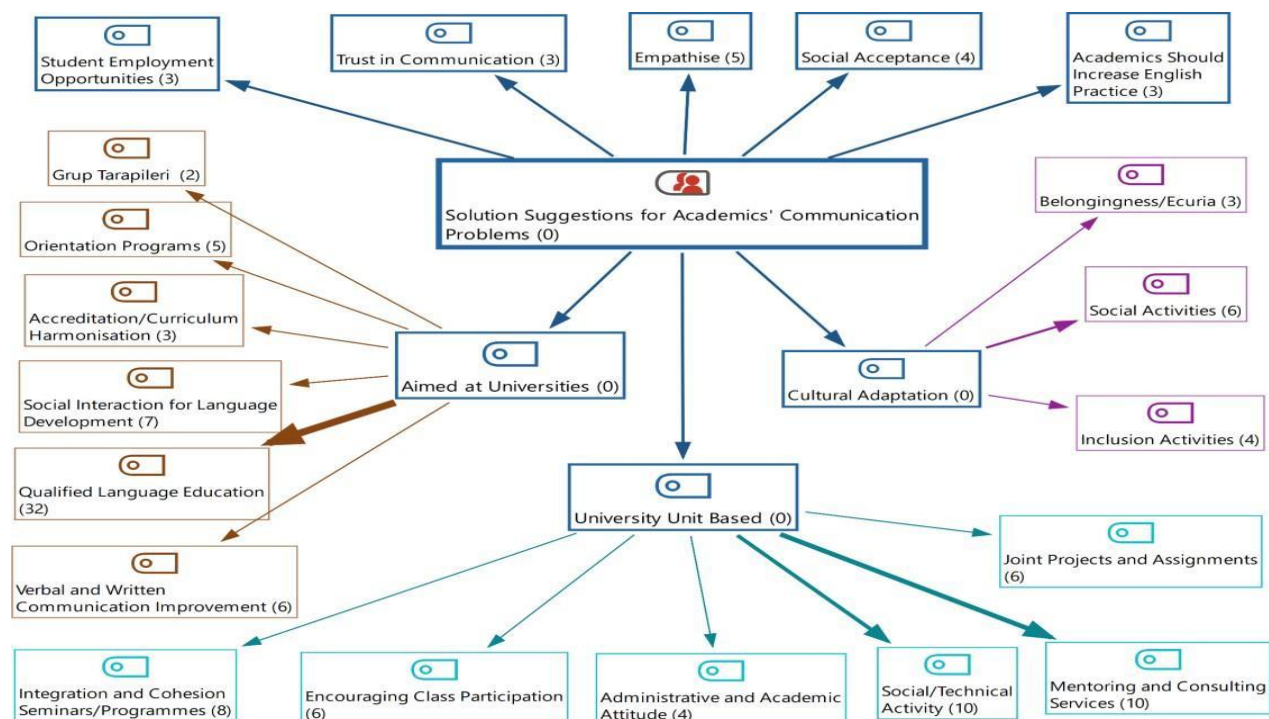


The prominent academic expressions—in participant academics’ own words—related to codes in Figure 3 are as follows:

- “We have problems due to language. Students suffer from alienation and loneliness because they have difficulty in communicating both with us and with other students. The language difference can also lead to problems such as not being able to take an active role in group work and, accordingly, incompatibility and reluctance to participate in activities. Naturally, this situation complicates their adaptation and integration processes. In addition, their speech is not understood due to pronunciation problems, and they have difficulty in expression in written exams” (A1).
- “Communication problems with foreign students are caused by language and cultural differences. They do not make much effort to understand Turkish, they mostly communicate with other foreign students who speak their own language. This situation causes adaptation problems in the classroom and social areas and makes social cohesion difficult” (A3).
- “Since I work at TÖMER (Turkish and Foreign Language Application and Research Centre), I have observed that there are various communication problems between academics and students during TÖMER exams. One of the main reasons for these disagreements is that the students do not know Turkish or English at a level to establish basic communication” (A8).
- “Since international students generally do not aim to adapt to Turkish culture, they keep themselves closed all the time, which leads to problems such as adaptation, communication, not being accepted by their friends, exclusion and ridicule” (A9).
- “...Some students may bring upper classmates who speak their own language and ask them to act as interpreters. In addition, they may use their language deficiencies as a justification for facilitating exams. Especially students from Arab countries may exhibit inappropriate behaviours in faculty-student relations and I encounter demands, such as raising course grades and providing privilege” (A15).

- *“Since students cannot express themselves due to language barrier, their level of participation in the lesson decreases and this creates shyness and distance from the lesson. They have difficulty in understanding foreign terms and concepts and have difficulty in writing” (A18).*
- *“The most basic communication problem I have with the foreign students taking my course stems from the fact that the students do not speak Turkish sufficiently. It can be said that this problem negatively affects the perception of the lesson, in-group (in-class) social relations of students with different languages and cultures, as well as the holistic execution of education and training in the classroom, ensuring harmonisation and, in the last stage, reducing the effect of the achievements of education and training activities” (A23).*
- *“These students have difficulties in communicating with their other friends due to language and cultural differences. They do not establish intimacy with them. Most of the time they sit at different desks and almost never speak during the lesson” (A24).*
- *“Since these students have a different language and culture, we find it difficult to find common images and characters in our conversations. For example, while other students remember a scene from a Turkish film and think the same thing, foreign students cannot share these feelings. In addition, since they are far from the university and culture in their language and school habits, they experience adaptation and harmonisation problems” (A25).*
- *“We experience cultural conflict and cultural adaptation problems in the history department, especially in language. Since foreign students do not know Turkish history, traditions and customs, they remain unfamiliar with these issues and this situation causes communication conflicts” (A29).*
- *“I have language problems with foreign students. Since the students have difficulty in communicating with us, they get support from other students who are fluent in both languages. Since they do not understand me, I get support from another student, which disrupts the communication between us” (A30).*
- *“They experience communication insecurity in the classroom due to language and cultural differences. They experience cultural incompatibility because they communicate among themselves. Therefore, it can be said that they tend to group among themselves” (A34).*
- *“...Students have communication problems in speaking, understanding, reading and writing Turkish; therefore, their level of participation in classes is quite low and they get low scores in exams. They also have problems in social relations; they have difficulties in forming groups with their Turkish friends, adapting to the school culture and participating in social activities” (A35).*

When answering the question “What are your suggestions for solutions to the communication problems you experience?” (presented in Figure 4), academics emphasized that the quality of language education should be improved as a priority in their solution suggestions. Academics also made various suggestions for universities and faculties to support the integration of international students.

Figure 4. Academics' Solution Suggestions for Communication Barriers

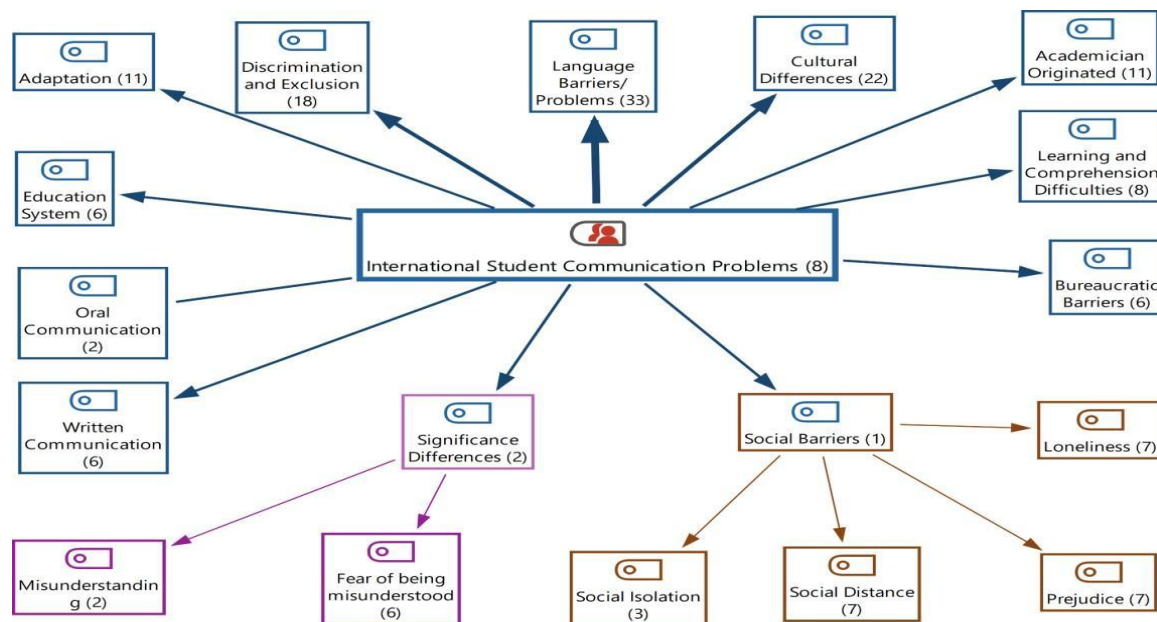
Prominent statements—in academics' own words—regarding the coding seen in Figure 4 include:

- “Programmes and activities should be organised to improve students' language and expression skills and overcome pronunciation problems. Students should be encouraged to participate in these programmes. In the classroom environment, academics should support students' participation in the lesson. In addition, the processes that cause students to feel lonely and foreign should be identified and integration and adaptation programmes should be developed accordingly” (A1).
- “In order to increase students' adaptation to the school and sense of belonging, academics, students, and the administration should act in cooperation; foreign students should be included in different groups, group therapies should be increased, communication between school and family should be strengthened, places where they can practice Turkish should be increased, and they should be encouraged to be directed to these places to solve their language barriers” (A3).
- “Orientation programmes should be prepared at YÖK, university, faculty, and department level; the counselling system should be organised separately from the local students in the class and wingmen should be appointed from volunteer students” (A4).
- “In order to increase the adaptation of international students and overcome communication barriers, units that can produce solutions to the problems of foreign students should be strengthened; in addition, it should be acted with the awareness that student and academic exchange programmes should be planned and managed as a part of public diplomacy” (A5).
- “As a solution to the communication barriers you experience, you should use visual aids, be patient, provide feedback and support, and organise language courses and orientation programmes for students” (A9).

- *“The first way to solve this communication barriers is to provide students with a comprehensive Turkish language education when they are prospective students; this education should include sub-headings, such as listening, reading, speaking and writing, and only a test exam similar to ÜDS (Interuniversity Board Foreign Language Exam) should not be sufficient for the student to receive academic education” (A10).*
- *“These students should be provided with a comprehensive Turkish language education in an accredited Turkish language teaching centre, co-education with Turkish students, not only international students, and activities to increase their integration with Turkish students (i.e., eating together in the dining hall, in-class, and in-department social activities, technical trips, and mutual home visits) should be organized” (A13).*
- *“Students coming here must first receive a serious language education. Thus, they will be able to communicate with more confidence as the process of understanding will be eliminated. Guidance services of universities for foreign students should be increased. Separate trainings should be given to accelerate their writing in Turkish” (A18).*
- *“Incentive programmes to increase participation in the course should be increased and the counselling process for students should be activated. Course and course contents should be brought to a more universal level. The perspectives of academics should be changed; for active participation in the course, academics should lecture more slowly and with careful word choice” (A19).*
- *“Cultural harmonisation should be ensured and trust should be established in communication. Empathic communication should be established in lessons and prejudices should be avoided. Semantic barriers should be eliminated and more incentive courses and social activities should be organised for this purpose” (A34).*
- *“The documents obtained from TÖMER for international students and practical language skills should be reviewed, and academics should improve their language skills by gaining experience abroad” (A42).*

Communication Barriers Experienced by International Students and Suggestions for Solutions

When we look at the communication barriers expressed by the international students who participated in the study, it was stated that the most common problem was the language barrier. Many students emphasized codes such as cultural differences, discrimination, and exclusion problems arising from academics, adaptation/adaptation problems, and learning and understanding difficulties. The prominent codes related to student participant responses to the question “What are the communication barriers we experience as international students?” are presented in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Codes Related to Communication Barriers Experienced by International Students

The following are prominent student participant responses—in students' own words—regarding the communication barriers presented in Figure 5:

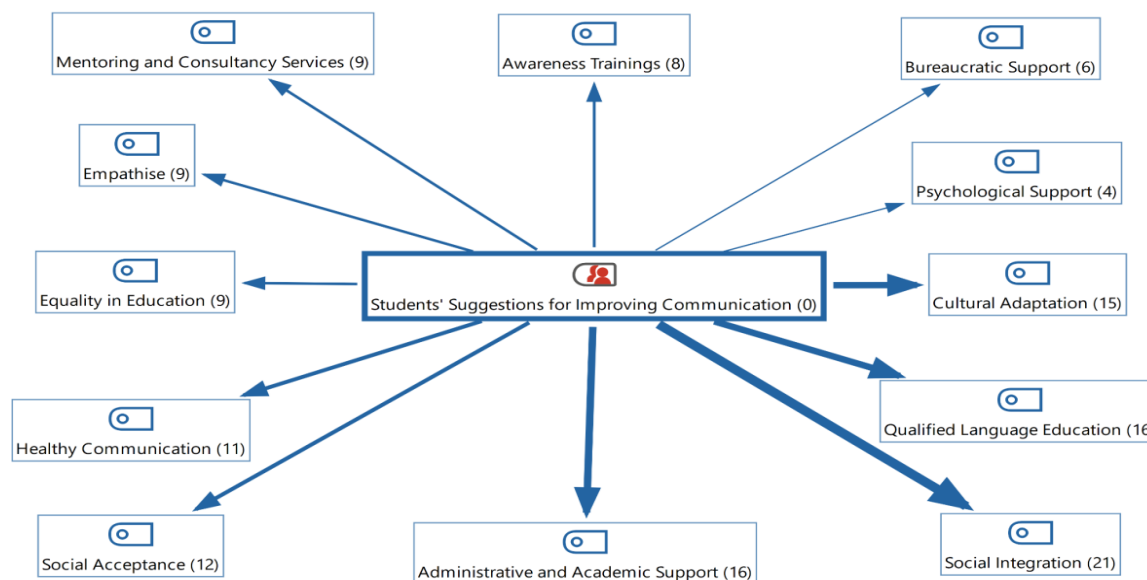
- “Language is the main axis of communication between people. For this reason, especially for foreign students studying at universities in Turkey in the first year, the lack of Turkish is a major communication barriers” (S1).
- “Due to language and cultural barriers, as foreign students we find it difficult to build strong social relationships with local students” (S2).
- “Due to the language barrier, as international students, we have difficulty communicating effectively and engaging in social interactions with other students on campus. This leads to social isolation and cultural integration problems” (S6).
- “In some cases, there were days when I avoided communication because I did not have a complete command of Turkish, so I was embarrassed. I was afraid of making wrong sentences and not being understood” (S7).
- “I have difficulty in writing and comprehension due to language” (S9).
- “I have difficulty in communicating with academics and students because I cannot speak Turkish well” (S14).
- “The prejudices of the society against foreigners tires the soul of a person and he avoids all communication with that culture. Because there is always a feeling of fear in him and the fact that he is considered as a criminal person because he is not accepted by some people in the place where he lives keeps him away from communication with the other side” (S20).
- “There are no activities for foreign students. No one does anything about it. There are adaptation difficulties in culture and tradition. We need to have the same opportunities as local students” (S22).

- “Being ridiculed, being asked to leave the country, not being accepted in the country” (S30).
- “My most important problem is language. The second problem is cultural adaptation” (S33).
- “For foreign students who do not speak Turkish or do not speak it well enough, it may be difficult to communicate in daily life, in lessons and social activities” (S35).
- “We have great difficulty in official procedures such as visa, residence permit, health insurance, language barrier and bureaucratic processes” (S38).
- “I have difficulty in communicating in language. Sometimes people do not communicate with me much because I am black. There are prejudices, there are cultural differences” (S40).
- “Our teachers don’t try to understand us. They do not communicate with us much. We try to understand the lecturers in class, but the lecturers do not make an effort to understand us” (S41).
- “We have difficulty in adapting to different traditions, customs and cultural values in the new” society (S49).

When answering the questions “What are your suggestions for solutions to the communication barriers you have experienced?” and “What are your suggestions for solutions to the communication barriers of international students?” most student participants stated that social integration should be ensured.

When we look at the other factors expressed by the student participants, factors such as providing qualified language education, providing administrative and academic support, ensuring cultural adaptation, ensuring social acceptance, and creating a healthy communication environment are mainly emphasized. Figure 6 presents international student prominent codes.

Figure 6. Solution Suggestions for International Students’ Communication Barriers



The following are prominent participant statements—in their own words—regarding the communication barriers of international students presented in Figure 6.

- *“In order to overcome the problem of Turkish language barrier, I think that the duration of Turkish courses should be extended and more qualified. This will give students time to learn and speak the language better and help them improve their communication skills” (S1).*
- *“Universities should educate faculty and local students about the importance of accepting cultural diversity and creating a prejudice-free environment” (S2).*
- *“Social areas for international students should be increased. Different activities should be organised for socializing” (S5).*
- *“Support programmes should be established to help foreign students adapt and cope with psychological and cultural difficulties” (S15).*
- *“The greatest responsibility for the success of the foreign student in his/her educational journey lies primarily with him/her and he/she should continuously improve his/her Turkish language level and integrate more widely into the society around him/her” (S28).*
- *“Benefiting from the guidance and support services offered by universities can help in finding solutions to academic and social problems” (S35).*
- *“Cultural adaptation programmes and orientation activities can be organised for new foreign students. These programmes can help students adapt to their new environment faster and establish healthier communication” (S38).*
- *“Our professors and students should not be prejudiced. The lecturers can teach the lesson a little slowly. I mean, let them explain slowly. They should communicate with us more” (S41).*
- *“Our lecturers should understand us and give us more time to express ourselves when they ask questions” (S43).*
- *“Establishing and developing social and psychological support programmes to help foreign students adapt and cope with psychological and cultural challenges” (S49)*

Discussion

Data for this study concluded that the main communication barrier that academics and international students have with one another is the language barrier. Based on the statements of academics, foreign students have difficulties in areas such as class participation and exam success when their knowledge of Turkish language is insufficient. Many studies—conducted at various education levels—concluded that academics and international students experience language problems when communicating with each other. Researchers (Çöllü & Öztürk, 2010; Enterieva & Sezgin, 2016; Ghanbary, 2017; Zavalısız & Gündag, 2017) found that the most important adaptation problem international students face in Turkey is the language. Similar problems have been found in studies (Andrade, 2006; Nuemaihom et al., 2018; Rosenthal et al., 2007; Sawir et al., 2012; Thao & Trung, 2022; Yanagi & Baker, 2016) conducted in different countries and regions as well. Our study shows that these findings are largely consistent with previous research.

This study also found that students and academic participants emphasized that the language barrier has negative effects in classes, as well as social relations and group work. A student’s difficulty in expressing themselves due to language barriers can negatively affect their social cohesion, communication with local people, and academic performance. In statements by the participating academics, international students stated that they avoid communicating with students and the public. In qualitative studies, it was concluded

that language barriers limit students' contact with host country citizens (Matera et al., 2018; Wang & Hannes, 2014), limit the development of meaningful relationships (Sawir et al., 2012), limit cultural learning opportunities, and negatively affect sociocultural adaptation (Trentman, 2013). These language-related problems are consistent with communication and intercultural theory (Kim, 2001), and the findings of this study are in line with similar studies on communication barriers, intercultural adaptation, and academic performance of international students in Turkey and globally (Cao et al., 2016).

Cultural differences stand out as an important source of student difficulty. Students with difficulty in understanding Turkish culture, traditions, and the school environment experience communication conflicts and adaptation problems. Some international students who participated in the study stated that they faced prejudice and discrimination in their academic and social lives. As a matter of fact, in the quantitative study conducted by Snoubar (2017), in the Turkish sample, significant levels of prejudice and discrimination were found. Factors such as cultural incompatibility, prejudice, and discrimination weaken the relationships between students and negatively affect academic success (Charles-Toussaint & Crowson, 2010; Wu et al., 2015; Yıldırım, 2014). Therefore, both students and academics drew attention to these problems and suggested solutions. Some participating international students stated that they experienced social isolation and loneliness, and those with no relatives or acquaintances nearby feel lonely and have difficulties. Since international students cannot make friends with local students, social contact decreases. Some studies have found that international student social groups (Iseminger et al., 2020) and increased intergroup contact increase friendships and a sense of security (Ranabahu & De Silva, 2024).

Academics have important responsibilities to help international students overcome language barriers and increase their social and academic success based on the findings. Glass et al. (2015) stated that faculty and academic staff are effective in changing international students' experiences and academic trajectories. Additionally, many previous studies show that more interaction between students and academics inside and outside the classroom increases university students' satisfaction and improves students' development and learning outcomes (Arambewela & Hall, 2009; Glass et al., 2017; Kim & Sax, 2009; Kuh, 2003; Wirt & Jaeger, 2014; Zhou & Cole, 2017). Based on these studies in the literature and the findings of the students, it is thought that the teaching staff and the quality of teaching can minimize the communication barriers of the students and increase the overall satisfaction level of the students.

An important problem that stands out in the statements of academics and students is the suggestions for improving academic counseling, university units, and student counseling. Brown and Holloway (2008) suggest that international students pay attention to the adjustment process and make this process an important part of the support services they offer. In addition, academics and other important people should teach students strategies to alleviate the discomfort they experience upon arrival and provide support for students to improve their adjustment process (Abarbanel, 2009). This study also found that academic staff and administrators need in-service training programs to sensitize them to the communication barriers faced by international students and to foster better interactions between international and local students.

According to Glass and Westmont (2014), promoting intercultural activities that transcend cultural differences is a mechanism that can help bridge the gap between international and local students. It is also understood from the findings that students expect information, resources, opportunities, and support from academics. Many international students see interaction with academics, administrators, and local communities as an important part of their learning experience. For these students, it is important to increase counseling, orientation programs, and social activities. Academics also suggest expanding the social spaces for international students and more interaction with other students. These suggestions overlap with similar findings made in different universities. Wu et al. (2015) stated that academics and staff should interact more with international students to better understand their needs and provide supportive campus resources

effectively. They also emphasized that universities should be ready to provide academic, as well as social and cultural, support.

Academics mostly focused on TÖMER exams and argued that they are insufficient for the admission of international students and that regulations should be made in this regard. Trice (2003) also stated that TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) scores are not a reliable criterion for English proficiency. In the statements of academics, students' inability to express themselves sufficiently in written exams stands out as an important problem. Some students stated that they had difficulties in academic writing even though they had improved their Turkish at the spoken level. This has been confirmed in studies showing that international students often have difficulties in written expression (Singh, 2005). For example, Kukatlappalli et al. (2020) found that Indian students adapted quickly to spoken language but had difficulty in academic writing.

Academics and students stated that the duration and quality of Turkish courses should be increased to overcome the Turkish language barrier and to increase integration. Universities should train academics and local students to support cultural diversity and to create a bias-free environment, as well as increase social spaces and activities that promote intercultural integration. In addition, continuous counseling and support services should be provided for students' personal development and integration into society. These recommendations have also been mentioned in various studies on the problems faced by international students (Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Ineson et al., 2006; Pantelidou & Craig, 2006; Yakunina et al., 2011). Academics also emphasized the importance of joint assignments and projects with local students for classroom cohesion, while Lee et al. (2019) highlighted the importance of developing a sense of partnership in the classroom.

Conclusion

Communication barriers between academics and international students during the education process were examined in this study using a phenomenological approach. The findings revealed that international students studying at universities in Turkey and academics generally face a number of communication barriers and some other problems. To overcome these difficulties, academics, students, other staff at the university, and the dynamics of the city (where the university is located) should motivate international students to solve their problems and encourage them to develop new learning strategies.

As the adaptation process is time consuming and demanding, support should be provided in various aspects. While international students have difficulties understanding academic terms, participating in class, and adapting to academic expectations, academics face difficulties in communicating effectively with students who speak a different language and come from a different cultural background. While these communication barriers negatively affect students' academic success and social adaptation processes, for academics, they also cause a decrease in academic productivity in courses. Universities should provide more support to international students to cope with these difficulties. Additionally, social spaces should be increased by providing resources. According to our findings for international students in overcoming their communication barriers, as well as their language problems, there is a need for group activities and social areas to increase the students' sense of belonging.

Academics' suggestions for solving these communication problems are important. Many academics emphasized that language education and cultural integration should be strengthened to organize comprehensive Turkish education programs and activities to improve students' language and expression skills. These trainings should be used not only for exam success but also for the development of students' practical language skills. During the education process, integration with Turkish students should be

encouraged through co-education and social activities, and orientation programs, language courses, and social activities should be organized for students. These recommendations offer concrete steps to increase the academic success of international students and strengthen their communication with academics. The findings of the study contribute to educational policies and practices and guide the creation of a more inclusive and effective learning environment.

Recommendations

Future studies can be conducted using mixed-method studies instead of the interview method. In addition, this study does not provide any findings on the effects of technology on the education and training processes of international students, which could be conducted to understand how digital technology contributes to communication barriers between academics and international students. Additionally, data were limited to different universities within Turkey in this study. Future research can examine the similarities and differences of communication barriers between academics and international students with studies conducted in educational institutions and cultural contexts in different countries. Finally, the effectiveness of language development programs that are implemented to increase the academic success of international students by researchers is an area in need of study. Education quality can be improved by conducting research to determine the extent to which these programs reduce communication barriers and contribute to students' academic and social adaptation.

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