

Cross-Cultural Communication Challenges Faced by International Students in Türkiye: A Psychological Perspective

Raisa Alatas^{†*} and Idil Sayimer[‡]

Abstract

This study examined the cross-cultural challenges faced by international students in Türkiye, with perceptions of discrimination and stereotyping recurring as key themes. It included prejudice and exclusion based on nationality or ethnicity, further complicating communication dynamics and a sense of belonging. International students in Türkiye face unique challenges when adjusting to a new educational environment, and one of the primary barriers they encounter is the language. Therefore, this study aimed to describe the cross-cultural communication challenges faced by International Students in Türkiye from a psychological perspective, deploying qualitative methods with a case study approach. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, this study explored the lived experiences of international students, aiming to determine the psychological mechanisms underlying their communication difficulties during acculturation in an unfamiliar academic and social environment. These findings reveal various challenges arising from language barriers, cultural differences, and the negotiation of identity. Moreover, language emerged as a significant barrier, with international students expressing frustration and anxiety due to their limited language skills, which hindered their ability to engage in academic discourse and social interactions. Language is crucial, while the physical and social environment influences the adaptation process. A proactive attitude facilitates integration despite barriers such as racism and stereotypes. It is then crucial to consider cultural influences in psychology, particularly in cross-cultural contexts. The experience of international students in Türkiye highlights the importance of intercultural dialogue, emphasising the need to understand different perspectives.

Keywords: Case Studies; Communication Barriers; Cross-Cultural Communication; International Students; Higher Education; Türkiye

[†] Department of Communication Sciences, Communication Faculty, Kocaeli University, Türkiye & Department of Communication Studies, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Tadulako University, Indonesia

* Corresponding Author Email: raisaalatas.ra@gmail.com

[‡] Department of Public Relations and Publicity, Communication Faculty, Kocaeli University, Türkiye

© 2025 Alatas & Sayimer. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Introduction

Cross-cultural communication can be complex due to differences in language, values, norms and expectations between individuals or groups from different cultures (Adler & Aycan, 2018; Ting-Toomey, Stella; Dorjee, 2019). These differences include one of the most important barriers between cultures, not only language but the differences in values and norms of the place, academic culture, and even stereotypes and prejudices of the local residents towards a person's inherent culture. Due to these distinctions, disagreements over cultural norms and beliefs can produce conflict or miscommunication.

The expectation gap in cross-cultural communication refers to the differences between the expectations held by individuals or groups and the reality encountered. This gap often occurs when individuals from different cultures hold different assumptions about appropriate communication styles. Dissatisfaction, frustration, or conflict may arise when these expectations are not met (KORKUT et al., 2018).

According to data gathered by UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation), the number of internationally mobile students worldwide has grown dramatically over the past 20 years. In fact, the number increased slightly from 6.38 million to 6.39 million during 2020 and 2021, even at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated mobility restrictions. Most of the world's internationally mobile students come from Asian countries. China had the largest number in 2021, with more than 1 million, doubling that of India, ranking second with approximately 508,000. Although the numbers were lower than those of the top two origin countries, Vietnam, Germany, and Uzbekistan were also significant contributors, each with about 100,000 students. With nearly 833,000 international students, the US remains the world's largest destination country, followed by the United Kingdom (nearly 601,000), Australia

(about 378,000), Germany (over 376,000), and Canada (almost 318,000) (UN Migration, 2024).

Türkiye has long been a sought-after destination for school and university recruiters, and for a good reason. The high demand among students in Türkiye to study abroad is largely driven by capacity challenges in the higher education system. During the 2022-2023 academic year, 301,694 international students were enrolled in associate, bachelor, master, or doctoral programs at Turkish higher education institutions. Bachelor's degree programs attracted the highest number of students, with approximately 131,200 men and 86,600 women (Dierks, 2024).

A study titled *International Students' Academic Achievement and Progress in Turkish Higher Education Context: Students' and Academics' Views* was conducted at the target university with 15 international students (10 men and 5 women) and 8 academics from various disciplines. The results showed that one of the most significant factors influencing the academic achievement and progress of international students in Türkiye was the appropriate use of Turkish language skills, particularly in writing.

Students are expected to adapt not only to the local culture but also to overcome culture shock. International students often face diverse experiences and challenges when adjusting to a new academic setting. Furthermore, mental, emotional, and academic well-being can be negatively impacted by challenges such as prejudice and cultural isolation (Arday, 2018).

International students often experience racism problems and are targeted for discrimination or prejudice based on national origin, language, or physical appearance (Dovchin, 2020; Yeo et al., 2019). Racism can manifest overtly through unfair treatment or verbal abuse or in more subtle forms, namely stereotypes and prejudice implicit in daily interactions (Fish & Syed, 2020).

Investigations carried out in the past have revealed the influence of racism and microaggressions on Asian international students. These students are often

miscategorised and subjected to xenophobic sentiments as a result of their different languages and the way they look, which shows that they are from different cultural backgrounds (Yao et al., 2019; Yeo et al., 2019). Even though some of the purposes of international schools are about promoting equality and social justice, problems still arise in how discrimination is attended to and how true cultural diversity is promoted (Boivin & Pacheco-Guffrey, 2022). This then means that there is still the presence of systemic racism, even though certain educational environments have made efforts to promote inclusivity. Educational processes play a critical role in perpetuating or mitigating disparities by reinforcing or challenging the cultural narratives underpinning societal power structures.

Hall's concept of environment elucidates how power operates through these narratives, shaping how different groups are perceived and treated (Jackson, 2020). Educational institutions that perpetuate dominant cultural narratives through biases in curriculum content, unequal access to resources, or discriminatory regulations contribute to the maintenance of inequities. Conversely, education that incorporates diverse perspectives, cultivates critical thinking, and guarantees equitable opportunities actively challenges these narratives, thereby mitigating existing disparities and fostering a more inclusive and just society.

Based on field observations, the stereotype often portrays international students as foreigners, reinforcing their exclusion from academic and social environments. The challenges like the language barrier that international students face when adapting to their new environment further add to this exclusion. The variations of languages in Türkiye can have a significant impact on their academic and social integration, which can make it even more difficult for the students to navigate an already complex cultural landscape.

Foreign students in Türkiye face numerous challenges in adapting to a new school environment. A significant problem is language, and Turkish is a very difficult language to learn

(Madeleine, 2022). Türkiye adaptation is diversified by cultures such as the educational system, social norms, and academic expectations. This process can include understanding the curriculum structure, study habits, and lecturer expectations. International students also need to learn how to negotiate a new university environment and overcome cultural and language differences in class discussions and group projects. Indirectly, communication and adaptation to culture must be carried out by international students to overcome obstacles in this cross-cultural process.

Living overseas necessitates cultural adaptation due to various sociocultural influences. A study titled *Socio-Cultural Factors as Antecedents of Cross-Cultural Adaptation in Expatriates, International Students, and Migrants* examined these factors by reviewing three groups—first-generation migrants, international students, and expatriates with their partners. Each group has unique perspectives on adaptation. The literature on international students, while diverse in theory and study, often presents differing conclusions (Bierwiazzonek & Waldzus, 2016).

An investigation conducted in 2016 used quantitative methods to examine migrants, expatriates, and international students (Bierwiazzonek & Waldzus, 2016). Conversely, future studies are expected to focus on international students in Türkiye using qualitative methods. Previous studies have shown that the literature on international students is the most theoretically and empirically diverse (Krsmanovic, 2021; Takeuchi & Chen, 2013). Therefore, this current study aims to provide a more detailed examination of the parallels and differences between the imagined and actual experiences of racism faced by international students when adjusting to life in Türkiye.

Focusing on cross-cultural communication challenges faced by international students offers valuable insights from a socio-cultural perspective in the adaptation process. Türkiye was selected as the study location because it has

grown as an academic destination, offering education influenced by European methods. Consequently, the following research question was raised: What are the challenges of cross-cultural communication among international students in Türkiye, viewed through a sociocultural-psychology perspective?

The study adopts a qualitative research approach, utilising in-depth interviews and thematic analysis to examine the lived experiences of international students. It focuses on key areas such as language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and the role of institutional support in facilitating adaptation. Furthermore, the study considers the psychological dimensions of cross-cultural adjustment, drawing on socio-cultural psychology to analyse how students navigate their identities and develop intercultural competence.

Theoretical Framework: Cross-Cultural Adaption and Racism

The study of cross-cultural differences aims to provide a deeper understanding of the communication between actors who engage based on disparate value systems and perceptions. In the past, in the field of intercultural communication, the anthropologist Edward T. Hall was frequently credited with creating the ideas of high-context and low-context communication. These ideas are frequently used in cross-cultural studies examining cultural differences as benchmarks (Holliday, 2007; Neulip, 2020).

Stuart Hall's cultural studies framework understands how racism and microaggressions against these phenomena are not isolated incidents but rather part of a broader systemic and ideological structure (Camangian & Cariaga, 2022). The representation theory states that meaning is constructed through language, images, and institutional practices rather than being an objective reflection of reality (Fuchs, 2023). This is because the way international students are perceived as "perpetual foreigners," "model minorities," or language-challenged—is derived from dominant societal discourses rather than their actual individual characteristics.

Hall's idea of hegemony, derived from Antonio Gramsci, explains how certain beliefs about race, culture, and belonging become accepted as "common sense" (Fuchs, 2023; Malyshko, 2024). Gramsci introduced the concept of cultural hegemony, which refers to the mechanisms through which the ruling class maintains dominance not solely through coercion but by shaping cultural norms and values that are internalised by the populace as common sense (Jones, 2007; Malyshko, 2024). His framework critically examines the role of educational systems in perpetuating hegemonic ideologies, thereby constraining critical engagement with societal structures and reinforcing existing power dynamics (Mayo, 2017).

Educational institutions may promote diversity and inclusion on the surface. However, when they subconsciously reinforce stereotypes about international students, such as assuming they do not face discrimination or do not need support, they are still enforcing systemic inequities because these educational structures do not operate in a vacuum. This systemic reinforcement of injustice can directly impact the process of cross-cultural adaptation, as it requires dealing with external biases and internal transformations to integrate into an unfamiliar culture.

Cross-cultural adaptation is a process where individuals undergo internal transformation to function effectively in an unfamiliar culture (Y. Y. Kim, 2017). In order to thrive in new environments, immigrants should adapt original cultural practices. This process involves deculturating certain original habits to assimilate new behaviours during the adaptive transformation. Communication exchanges between individuals and the host environment facilitate both deculturation and assimilation. Extensive and prolonged interactions with the host culture can foster integration into mainstream society (Y. Y. Kim, 2017; Rui & Wang, 2015).

All individuals entering a foreign culture embark on cross-cultural adaptation, even though experience varies in duration, scope, and intensity. The integration of the communication

theory of cross-cultural adaptation aims to explain this phenomenon for individuals who traverse cultural or subcultural boundaries over extended periods (De La Garza & Ono, 2015; Y. Y. Kim, 2017). This theory originated from Kim's dissertation study on Korean immigrants in the Chicago area and has since been supported by various studies involving immigrant groups, international students, and domestic ethnic minorities (Y. Kim, 2001).

Changes during adaptation are driven by inputs from the environment, which serves as a broader system. This process involves stress and adaptability movements that occur in a stress-adaptation dialectic, leading to gradual change. Communication, both interpersonal and social, plays a significant role in facilitating adaptation and transformation (Kuo, 2014). Host communication competence, comprising cognitive, affective, and operational knowledge shared with the host culture, becomes increasingly critical during adaptation. Cognitive competency includes understanding the language, culture, institutions, and other significant aspects of the host system. Affective competence refers to the motivation to adapt and appreciate the host culture, while operational competence involves acquiring the skills needed for integration. The effectiveness of adaptation is influenced by three key environmental factors. These include ethnic group strength, or the support individuals receive from their ethnic community; host receptivity, or the level of acceptance offered by the host community; and host community pressure, or the expectations imposed by the host community for adaptation. For instance, some groups may actively dissuade members from assimilating into the new society (Y. Kim, 2001; Y. Y. Kim, 2017; Littlejohn & Foss, 2011).

The focus of this discussion is on international students, particularly those residing in Türkiye. The theoretical analysis model describes several factors influencing the cross-cultural adaptation process. In the environmental domain, international students face stressors such as language barriers, cultural differences, academic challenges, and the need for effective coping

strategies (Kuo, 2014). Social support networks, including family members in the home country, Turkish friends, international student associations, and university support services, play a crucial role in facilitating this stage. Therefore, addressing racism in cross-cultural communication requires a comprehensive understanding of stereotypes and pragmatic distinctions.

International students' or immigrants' adaptation is not only influenced by environmental conditions, as individuals embark on the cross-cultural adaptation process with a unique set of pre-existing characteristics. Regarding predisposition factors, Turkish language acquisition, understanding Turkish culture, and adapting to the values and norms that exist in Türkiye are needed as stages in cross-cultural communication. Meanwhile, integrating into Turkish society and socialising with locals is included in the sociocultural discussion at this stage of Kim's theory.

Turkish language skills are important, but understanding Turkish people's communication styles and navigating interaction models is a determinant in adapting to cross-cultural communication. Perceived cultural distance in when international students begin to compare their culture and Turkish culture as a new culture, feel the impact of the adaptation process and look for similarities and differences.

International students, for instance, frequently experience prejudice and social marginalisation, which makes it more difficult for them to adapt to a new cultural environment. Research indicates that these students who are not exclusive to Türkiye face greater degrees of social isolation and loneliness, particularly when cultural differences are evident, which exacerbates acculturative stress (Çarkçı, 2024). Moreover, misperceptions about socio-cultural issues can foster racism and ethnocentrism among sojourners, further hindering the capacity to adapt (Alkhoraif, 2024). Kim's theory identifies individuals as the primary "mover" and "burden bearer" in a journey of adaptation that unfolds through communicative engagement (Y. Y. Kim, 2017).

Methodology

This study used a qualitative design with a case study method guided by the research problem and objectives. It aimed to examine the difficulties in intercultural communication faced by international students in Türkiye, analysed through psychological, cultural and communication perspectives. As a qualitative methodology, a case study investigates real-life scenarios through comprehensive and systematic data collection using multiple sources of information, including documents, audio-visual materials, interviews, and observations. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and observations with international students enrolled at Turkish universities. Purposive sampling was used to obtain more relevant data, and snowball sampling helped select primary data sources (participants).

Face-to-face interviews were conducted in both English and Turkish, allowing participants to select their preferred language. Most interviews were conducted in English, except for one interview, which was conducted in Turkish with a participant from Kazakhstan. Data analysis involved transcribing and systematically organising materials, including audio recordings and photographs. To ensure accuracy, TurboScribe was used to transcribe the recorded interviews, and the Turkish interview was subsequently translated into English to maintain consistency in the analysis. Ethical considerations were rigorously observed, including obtaining informed consent, ensuring participant confidentiality, and securely storing the collected data to safeguard identities and responses. This was then followed by coding and summarising to reduce the data, and the results were presented as tables, charts, or conversations. To improve the reliability, triangulation was applied by comparing data from different sources to ensure that they are consistent.

Backdrop: An Exploration of Cultural Identity and Environmental Influences

Cross-cultural communication among international students refers to interaction between individuals who are from different

academic, social, and cultural settings (Byrne et al., 2019; Kutor et al., 2021). Environmental factors that include physical, social, and cultural contexts influence how people relate, talk, and interact (Bierwiazzonek & Waldzus, 2016; Y. Y. Kim, 2017; Littlejohn & Foss, 2011). The university environment and the cultural dynamics of Turkish society play a role in shaping these interactions. Algerian students, for example, often benefit from resources like language programs, including DILMER and TÖMER.

When international students face unexpected problems in a new cultural environment, culture shock happens. For example, students from Libya who perceived that the Libyan and Turkish cultures were very similar experienced culture shock when they noticed differences. The same thing also happened to students from Kazakhstan, who see language proficiency as necessary for surviving in Türkiye. On the other hand, African students felt significant cultural differences between Senegal and Türkiye, making their adaptation more difficult. The culture was said to be "not the same thing," which indicates the large differences. These cultural differences impact various aspects of life, from social interactions to daily routines (Wu et al., 2015). As one of the respondents said:

So, when we want to talk, we have to start first. But when we start talking, they are always open to us. So, we have to start first. (Indonesian Student)

However, the willingness to initiate conversation and adapt to Turkish communication norms demonstrated a tendency towards open-mindedness and interpersonal engagement, which are important for successful cross-cultural adaptation. Despite facing challenges such as language mixing and cultural differences, Kazakhstan students demonstrated resilience and adaptability, which facilitated integration into Turkish society. Predispositions include individual characteristics, attitudes, and motivations influencing adaptation outcomes (Y. Y. Kim, 2017; Ting-Toomey, Stella; Dorjee, 2019).

Algerian students demonstrated a proactive approach to adaptation, characterised by

excitement, curiosity, and a willingness to engage with Turkish culture. This cannot be separated from the host's communication skills, namely the ability to communicate effectively with individuals from other cultures. According to Senegalese students, Turkish people often give strange looks, mainly when using transportation. This reaction can be interpreted as an example of exoticism, a phenomenon where individuals of different racial or cultural backgrounds are viewed as strange or foreign.

Exoticism describes how certain groups of individuals are viewed as unusual or fascinating due to variations in appearance or culture. Exoticism can be a form of racism, even when it is not explicit, emphasising "otherness" and reducing individuals to stereotypes (Giuliani, 2016). When students' distinctions are emphasised to prompt exclusion or alienation, it reflects underlying racial bias. This attitude can create feelings of isolation and discomfort for international students, including the following forms of racism and stereotypes:

I do not understand. When they know you speak Arabic and hear you, suddenly they start looking at you in a disgusted way. Or maybe they try to say something bad to you. Alternatively, maybe they will make a gesture like... or something like that to express that they are annoyed by your existence next to them—just because you are speaking Arabic. (Algerian Student)

Many Turkish individuals, regrettably, exhibit a lack of awareness. Consequently, rather than identifying myself as Arab, I often claim to be Libyan. On occasion, people assume I am from Syria. At times, I even state that I am not Arab but North African, which is technically accurate, as Libya is located in North Africa primarily to avoid drawing attention to myself. I believe that by doing so, I may be more readily accepted and not subjected to differential treatment. (Libyan Student)

I must carefully manage my actions, as many Turkish individuals tend to

associate Africans with poverty, despite the fact that not all Africans are poor. This misconception is largely driven by widespread misinformation about Africa. Consequently, I feel a responsibility to present a more accurate image of African people, one that challenges the narrative that we are perpetually in need of assistance. It is neither necessary nor appropriate to reinforce stereotypes suggesting that we lack basic necessities such as water. Additionally, I often encounter curiosity regarding my appearance, particularly my skin colour, which I find uncomfortable. It is important to emphasise that I am not a person in need of charity. (African Student)

An Algerian student in Türkiye experienced racial prejudice and cultural gaps in daily interactions. The student dealt with cultural stereotypes and preconceptions about Africans and Arabs despite being proud of Algerian identity. These difficulties may foster isolation or marginalisation, emphasising the adverse effects of racial bias on social interactions.

Due to linguistic similarities, the Kazakh student's fluency in Turkish improved social connections and communication with Turkish classmates. Identically, Afghan students experienced pressure to adhere to specific Turkish traditions. The gap between the locals' inadequate English proficiency and international students' efforts to acquire Turkish language skills underscores the significance of communication abilities in promoting intercultural understanding.

Language proficiency emerges as a significant communication challenge for African students whose native language is French. It is very different, thus affecting their ability to express themselves effectively and engage in academic activities. African students' communication patterns also evolved over time as they became more familiar with Turkish culture and language. Moreover, communication patterns are crucial for cross-cultural adaptation as individuals learn to navigate differences in language, non-verbal

cues, and cultural norms (Y. Kim, 2001; Y. Y. Kim, 2017; Littlejohn & Foss, 2011). For this reason, international students often stress the importance of Turkish language skills in forming connections with locals.

In cross-cultural settings, communication patterns are not static. People adapt their styles to the cultural context while maintaining aspects of their own cultural identity (Ting-Toomey, Stella ; Dorjee, 2019). For example, Indonesian students have observed differences in communication styles, social interactions, and norms between Indonesia and Türkiye. These differences, such as variations in greetings and social behaviour, show the need for cultural adaptability. Similarly, Kazakh students face misunderstandings that arise from assumptions about their language skills and cultural background.

Code-switching—shifting between languages or dialects depending on the context—is a common strategy in multicultural environments. This enables individuals to tailor their communication to meet the expectations of various groups, resulting in smoother interactions and reduced bias. Sociolinguistic theories view code-switching as managing social identity and addressing power dynamics in interactions (Yim & Clément, 2021). It illustrates the balance between maintaining cultural identity and integrating into a new society.

Some international students choose to preserve their cultural habits rather than adapt to differences. Ethnocentric individuals, for instance, judge other cultures based on their own cultural values, often viewing other cultures as less compatible or unfavourable (Y. Kim, 2001).

As Algerian, we have a mentality that we are proud of our nationality, language, and culture everywhere. (Algerian Student)

Ethnocentric individuals may have difficulty understanding the experiences or perspectives of people from other cultures. This is due to the tendency to perceive the world differently without considering the diversity or complexity

of other perspectives and cultural values. Intercultural transformation refers to changes in attitudes, behaviour, and identity that occur as a result of cross-cultural encounters (Y. Y. Kim, 2017; Littlejohn & Foss, 2011). This journey reflects the complex process of cross-cultural adaptation, in which maintaining personal identity and integrating into a new culture coexist.

Discussion: Psychological Strategy as a Side Effect

According to cross-cultural history, culture is increasingly important in contemporary psychology. Although significant conceptual differences exist in how culture and behaviour interact, culture is essential to understanding human behaviour. The theory encompasses absolutism and relativism, which have had a significant methodological impact on modern research, including values (such as individualism and collectivism), gender differences, cognition, aggression, intergroup relations, and psychological acculturation. Terms like cross-cultural psychology and culture become unnecessary when psychology begins to consider how culture influences human behaviour (and vice versa) (Ward et al., 2020).

John W. Berry is a leading figure in the field of cross-cultural psychology, known for pioneering work exploring the complex interactions between culture and psychology (Berry, 1992, 2015). Throughout an illustrious career, Berry significantly made several contributions to the knowledge of how culture shapes human behaviour, cognition, and development. Berry's theoretical framework, insights into cultural dynamics, and the profound implications of work in psychology are well recognised (Berry, 2001). Berry's acculturation model asserts that when people go through cultural change, they can pick one of four strategies to deal with it (Berry, 1992):

- **Assimilation:** The individual abandons the original cultural identity and adopts the cultural norms and practices of the dominant group.
- **Integration:** This basically involves maintaining the original cultural

identity, while adopting the new culture, leading to a bicultural identity.

- **Separation:** This means maintaining original cultural identity, as well as preventing interactions with the dominant culture.
- **Marginalisation** occurs when individuals do not maintain their original cultural identity or participate in the dominant culture, leading to a sense of alienation and loss of identity.

Acculturation strategies reveal how individuals can handle cultural interactions in a new place. Meanwhile, assimilation means adopting the dominant culture's ways and leaving behind one's own culture.

The experiences of Algerian students correlate with the integration strategy. Helping Turkish friends with Arabic shows the ability to connect cultures and promote mutual understanding. This approach shows an integrated mindset, valuing both the host country's culture and personal heritage. However, the presence of exoticism, where cultural differences are viewed as strange or novel, can lead to isolation and discomfort for international students.

Senegalese students faced stereotypical questions about poverty and living conditions in Africa, and it shows ethnocentric attitudes and cultural narrowness rather than explicit racism. Students' acculturation in Türkiye involved a blend of assimilation and marginalisation, adapting to the new culture and, at the same time, maintaining a Senegalese identity. Despite the challenges, the students balanced cultural roots with Turkish experiences, shedding light on the subtle racism stemming from limited cultural understanding. In this context, the Indonesian students' experience, analysed through Berry's acculturation theory, reveals challenges in cross-cultural communication faced by international students in Türkiye. The students noted differences in social customs, such as greetings and public behaviour, with Indonesian culture being more conservative and open compared to Türkiye's liberal and European-influenced norms.

The exploration of cultural syndromes by Berry has revealed the various ways through which culture impacts psychological processes. In this context, cultural syndromes mean patterns of behaviour, cognition, and emotion that are characteristic of a particular cultural group. By studying cultural syndromes, Berry explained how different cultures perceive and respond to various psychological phenomena, such as happiness, sadness, and social norms. Berry also revealed the need to develop culturally competent interventions that considered the cultural values, beliefs, and practices of the individuals served. In this regard, culturally competent interventions are designed to be respectful, responsive, and effective in meeting the needs of diverse groups, as well as promote positive mental health outcomes (Berry, 1992; Berry & Dasen, 2019).

The major challenge occurs for students whose mother tongue is Arabic. Algerian students experienced exclusion due to cultural differences between Algeria and Türkiye, especially regarding religious practices and social norms, such as smoking. Despite facing racism, the students decided not to confront it directly, displaying a desire to avoid negative experiences.

Political, social, and historical factors have shaped racism in Arab culture, specifically in relation to Türkiye. A complicated interaction between nationalism, cultural myths, and media representations shapes how Arabs are perceived. The history of the Ottoman Empire has created a tense historical connection between Turks and Arabs (Ayşecan, 2018). While this period witnessed instances of cooperation, tensions emerged, particularly during World War I, when certain Arab leaders, motivated by British assurances of independence, revolted against Ottoman rule. This event is frequently characterised in Türkiye as the 'Arab betrayal,' which has indeed contributed to enduring historical grievances and continues to influence contemporary perceptions and relations between the two groups (Bantekas & Al-Thani, 2024; Hasou, 2019).

John W. Berry's work proves that culture has significant implications in the field of psychology, especially in terms of research, assessment and intervention. By recognising the influence of culture on psychological processes, psychologists can develop more culturally sensitive research methods and assessment tools that accurately capture the experiences of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds (Berry, 1992; Berry & Dasen, 2019).

Berry's theoretical contribution to the field of psychology is very large, especially in cross-cultural psychology. Berry has explained how culture profoundly shapes human cognition, emotion, and behaviour. Berry enriches understanding of the complex interactions between culture and psychology. As civilised societies navigate an increasingly globalised world, the insights gained are invaluable in fostering better cultural understanding and improving psychological well-being in various communities (Berry, 2015; Berry & Dasen, 2019).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the process of cross-cultural communication for international students is challenging. Language has been regarded to be very important as it serves as the foundation for intercultural interactions. Moreover, environmental factors like physical and social elements have a significant influence on the process of adaptation. These factors play a role in the experiences of international students and present problems like language barriers, differences in social norms, and mismatched expectations. In this context, Algerian and Kazakh students emphasised that being proactive and open-minded can help them to adapt quickly. However, problems like racism and stereotypes can create challenges, which can cause discomfort and isolation for African and Arab students.

Adaptation strategies, like code-switching and trying to balance one's own culture with a new one, are often confusing and overly complicated. Ethnocentrism, where people judge other cultures based on their own, makes it harder for anyone to adapt and creates unnecessary problems in cross-cultural interactions.

Intercultural transformation, which is supposed to involve changes in attitudes and behaviours through cross-cultural experiences, often feels forced and impractical, making it difficult to preserve one's original cultural identity.

This study aimed to emphasise the role of psychology in cross-cultural interactions but failed to offer practical solutions. The experiences of international students in Türkiye exposed a lack of genuine intercultural understanding. Moreover, stereotypes and cultural differences overshadowed any meaningful progress, and while international students attempted to engage with locals, the challenges they faced often made their efforts seem futile.

References

- Alkhoraif, A. (2024). A Qualitative Analysis of Cross-cultural Adjustment and Job Performance in the Hotel Industry: The Case of Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Ecohumanism*, 3(4), 1473–1485. <https://doi.org/10.62754/joe.v3i4.3676>
- Adler, N. J., & Aycan, Z. (2018). Cross-cultural interaction: What we know and what we need to know. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 5(1), 307–333. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-032117-104528>
- Arday, J. (2018). Understanding mental health: What are the issues for black and ethnic minority students at University? *Social Sciences*, 7(10). <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci7100196>
- Bantekas, I., & Al-Thani, M. (2024). Self-determination and territorial agreements in the Middle East: From the Ottomans to colonial rule. *Emory International Law Review*, 39(1), 77–133. <https://scholarlycommons.law.emory.edu/eilr/vol39/iss1/3>
- Berry, J. W. (1992). Acculturation and Adaptation in a New Society. *International Migration*, 30(s1), 69–85. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2435.1992.tb00776.x>
- Berry, J. W. (2001). A Psychology of Immigration. *Journal of Social Issues*, 57(3),

615–631. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0022-4537.00231>

Berry, J. W. (2015). Global psychology: implications for cross-cultural research and management. *Cross Cultural Management*, 22(3), 342–355. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CCM-03-2015-0031>

Berry, J. W., & Dasen, P. R. (Eds.). (2019). *Culture and Cognition*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429024214>

Bierwiazzonek, K., & Waldzus, S. (2016). Socio-Cultural Factors as Antecedents of Cross-Cultural Adaptation in Expatriates, International Students, and Migrants. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 47(6), 767–817. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022116644526>

Boivin, J. A., & Pacheco-Guffrey, H. (Eds.). (2022). Education as the Driving Force of Equity for the Marginalized. *IGI Global*. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-8025-7>

Byrne, E., Brugha, R., & McGarvey, A. (2019). “A melting pot of cultures” -challenges in social adaptation and interactions amongst international medical students. *BMC Medical Education*, 19(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-019-1514-1>

Camangian, P., & Cariaga, S. (2022). Social and emotional learning is hegemonic miseducation: students deserve humanization instead. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 25(7), 901–921. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2020.1798374>

Çarkçı, F. (2024). *The Mediating Roles of Perceived Cultural Distance and Perceived Social Support in The Relationship Between Acculturative Stress and General Adaptation of International Students in Türkiye* [Middle East Technical University, Türkiye]. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/3101178416?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true>

De La Garza, A. T., & Ono, K. A. (2015). Rethorizing Adaptation: Differential Adaptation and Critical Intercultural Communication. *Journal of International and Intercultural Communication*, 8(4), 269–289.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/17513057.2015.1087097>

Dierks, Z. (2024). *Number of Foreign Students in Higher Education in Turkey 2022/2023, by Level and Gender [Dataset]*. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1360610/turkey-foreign-students-in-higher-education-by-study-level-and-gender/>

Dovchin, S. (2020). The psychological damages of linguistic racism and international students in Australia. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 23(7), 804–818. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2020.1759504>

Fish, J., & Syed, M. (2020). Racism, Discrimination, and Prejudice. *The Encyclopedia of Child and Adolescent Development* (pp. 1–12). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119171492.wecad464>

Fuchs, C. (2023). A Marxist-Humanist perspective on Stuart Hall’s communication theory. *Theory and Society*, 52(6), 995–1029. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-023-09524-5>

Giuliani, G. (2016). Gender, Race and the Colonial Archive. Sexualized Exoticism and Gendered Racism in Contemporary Italy. *Italian Studies*, 71(4), 550–567. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00751634.2016.1222767>

Hasou, T. Y. (2019). *The Struggle for the Arab World*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315829074>

Holliday, A. (2007). Book Review: Gudykunst, W. B. (2005). Theorizing about intercultural communication. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Pp. 492. *International Criminal Justice Review*, 17(4), 351–353. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1057567707310554>

Jackson, J. (Ed.). (2020). *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Intercultural Communication*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003036210>

Jones, S. (2007). *Antonio Gramsci*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203625521>

- Kim, Y. (2001). *Becoming Intercultural: An Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross-Cultural Adaptation*. SAGE Publications, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452233253>
- Kim, Y. Y. (2017). Cross-Cultural Adaptation. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.21>
- KORKUT, P. K., DOLMACI, M., & KARACA, B. (2018). A Study on Communication Breakdowns: Sources of Misunderstanding in a Cross-Cultural Setting. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, 18(78), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.14689/ejer.2018.78.7>
- Krsmanovic, M. (2021). The synthesis and future directions of empirical research on international students in the United States: The insights from one decade. *Journal of International Students*, 11(1), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v11i1.1955>
- Kuo, B. C. H. (2014). Coping, acculturation, and psychological adaptation among migrants: a theoretical and empirical review and synthesis of the literature. *Health Psychology and Behavioral Medicine*, 2(1), 16–33. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21642850.2013.843459>
- Kutor, S. K., Raileanu, A., & Simandan, D. (2021). International migration, cross-cultural interaction, and the development of personal wisdom. *Migration Studies*, 9(3), 490–513. <https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnz049>
- Littlejohn, S. W., & Foss, K. A. (2011). *Theories of human communication* (10th ed.). Waveland Press.
- Madeleine, L. (2022). *The Complete List of Language Difficulty Rankings*. Rosetta Stone. <https://blog.rosettastone.com/the-complete-list-of-language-difficulty-rankings/>
- Malyshko, Y. A. (2024). *The Concept of “Cultural Hegemony” by A. Gramsci in the Works of the Frankfurt School (M. Horkheimer, T. Adorno, and H. Marcuse)*. *Общество: Политика, Экономика, Право*, 7, 76–81. <https://doi.org/10.24158/pep.2024.7.9>
- Mayo, P. (2017). Gramsci, Hegemony and Educational Politics. In Antonio Gramsci: *A Pedagogy to Change the World* (pp. 35–47). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-40449-3_2
- Neulip, J. W. (2020). *Intercultural Communication: A Contextual Approach* (8th Editio). SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Rui, J. R., & Wang, H. (2015). Social network sites and international students’ cross-cultural adaptation. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 49, 400–411. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2015.03.041>
- Takeuchi, R., & Chen, J. (2013). The impact of international experiences for expatriates’ cross-cultural adjustment. *Organizational Psychology Review*, 3(3), 248–290. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2041386613492167>
- Ting-Toomey, Stella ; Dorjee, T. (2019). *Communicating Across Cultures* (2nd Editio). The Guilford Press.
- UN Migration. (2024). Migration and Migrants: A Global Overview International students. *International Organization for Migration*. <https://worldmigrationreport.iom.int/what-we-do/world-migration-report-2024-chapter-2/international-students>
- Ward, C., Bochner, S., & Furnham, A. (2020). *The Psychology of Culture Shock*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003070696>
- Wu, H., Garza, E., & Guzman, N. (2015). International Student’s Challenge and Adjustment to College. *Education Research International*, 2015, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1155/2015/202753>
- Yao, C. W., George Mwangi, C. A., & Malaney Brown, V. K. (2019). Exploring the intersection of transnationalism and critical race theory: a critical race analysis of international student experiences in the United States. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 22(1), 38–58. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2018.1497968>
- Yeo, H. T., Mendenhall, R., Harwood, S. A., & Hunt, M. B. (2019). Asian International Student and Asian American Student: Mistaken Identity

and Racial Microaggressions. *Journal of International Students*, 9(1), 39–65.
<https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v9i1.278>

Yim, O., & Clément, R. (2021). Acculturation and attitudes toward code-switching: A bidimensional framework. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, 25(5), 1369–1388.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/13670069211019466>

Ethical Approval

Evrak Tarih ve Sayısı: 24.03.2025-E.753172



T.C.
KOCAELİ ÜNİVERSİTESİ REKTÖRLÜĞÜ
Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Etik Kurulu



Sayı : E-94094268-605-753172
Konu : Etik Kurul İzin Hk.

Sayın Prof.Dr. İdil SAYIMER

İlgi : 13.03.2025 tarihli ve E-98238796-605-748439 sayılı yazı.

Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Etik Kurulunun 21/03/2025 tarih ve 2025/03 no lu toplantısında alınan 36 sıra sayılı kararı aşağıda sunulmuştur.

Bilgilerinize rica ederim.

Karar No 36: Prof. Dr. İdil SAYIMER'in 13.03.2025 tarih ve 748439 sayılı yazısı görüşüldü. Prof. Dr. İdil SAYIMER'in, doktora programı öğrencisi Raisa ALATAS ile birlikte yürüteceği "Türkiye'deki Uluslararası Öğrencilerin Karşılaştığı Kültürlerarası İletişim Zorlukları: Psikolojik Bir Perspektif" başlıklı çalışmanın bilimsel araştırma ve yayın etiği açısından uygun olduğuna oy birliği ile karar verildi.

Prof.Dr. Mine HALİS
Kurul Başkanı

Mevcut Elektronik İmzalar

MİNE HALİS (Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Etik Kurulu - Kurul Başkanı) 24.03.2025 15:05

Belge Doğrulama Kodu :BSU1U8HMHZ Belge Doğrulama Adresi :<https://turkiye.gov.tr/kocaeli-universitesi-ebv>
Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Etik Kurulu Kocaeli Üniversitesi Umuttepe Yerleşkesi Bilgi için: Pelin ÜNALDI DOLGUN
41380, Kocaeli
Tel: +90 (262) 303 10 01 Faks: +90 (262) 303 10 33 Raportör
E-Posta : rekiletisim@kocaeli.edu.tr Elektronik Ağ : <http://www.kocaeli.edu.tr> Telefon No: 303 10 49
Kep Adresi: kocaeliuniversitesi@hs01.kep.tr

Bu belge 5070 sayılı Elektronik İmza Kanununun 5. Maddesi gereğince güvenli elektronik imza ile imzalanmıştır.

Conflict of Interest

We declare no conflict of interest. We confirm that all authors have reviewed and approved the manuscript for submission. We affirm that the article is the original work of the authors and has not been previously published, nor is it under

consideration for publication elsewhere. On behalf of the co-author, the corresponding author assumes full responsibility for the submission. Furthermore, the authors declare that there is no conflict of interest, whether financial or non-financial, related to this

research. We declare that the article was not prepared using AI-generated text. We also declare that the figures deployed in the study were not generated using AI-assisted tools.

Author Contribution Statement

R.A. and I.S. jointly conceived the research idea and developed the theoretical framework. R.A. conducted the data collection, verified the analytical methods, and performed the analytic research. I.S. supervised the research, encouraged the exploration of specific aspects such as racism and stereotypes, and guided the overall research direction. Both R.A. and I.S. contributed to the design and implementation of the study, as well as the interpretation of the results. R.A. took the lead in writing the manuscript, with input and critical feedback from I.S. All authors discussed the findings contributed to the final version of the manuscript, and helped shape the research, analysis, and conclusions.

Informed Consent Statement

This study adheres to ethical research principles, ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of all participants. As the names and identities of informants have been anonymised, obtaining written consent was not required. Collecting identifiable consent forms or datasets containing participant information was avoided to prevent any potential breach of privacy. The study was conducted following ethical guidelines, and participation was entirely voluntary.

Funding Statement

The authors fully funded this research. No external funding or financial support was received from any organisation or institution.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the anonymous reviewers for their valuable feedback and insightful suggestions, which have greatly improved this manuscript.

About the Authors

Raisa Alatas is a PhD candidate in the Department of Communication Sciences, Faculty of Communication, at Kocaeli University, Türkiye. She is also a Lecturer in the Department of Communication Sciences, Faculty of Social and Political Science, at Tadulako University, Indonesia (since 2019-present). Her research interests include intercultural communication, cross-cultural communication, terrorism and Islamic communication, as well as communication and artificial intelligence. Her latest conference presentation, *The Effectiveness of AI Algorithms in CSR Issues in the Mining Sector and Worker Safety at the IMIP Nickel Company* was held at Istanbul Arel University (2024). Additionally, Atlantis Press published her most recent publication, *Combating Radicalism and Communicating Peace: A Case Study of the Deradicalization Process of the Terrorism-Impacted Area of Gunung Biru*, as part of Springer Nature (2025).

Professor İdil Sayimer is the Dean of the Faculty of Communication at Kocaeli University, Türkiye (November 2024–present). She has been the Head of the Public Relations Department since 2011 and the Head of the New Media Center since 2017. She obtained her MA and PhD degrees from Istanbul University, Faculty of Communication, in the Public Relations and Publicity program. Her research interests include public relations, digital marketing communications, new media, and intercultural and interpersonal communications.