

Chapter 11

International Turkish Student Experience in Canadian Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

This study explores and discusses the experience of students from Turkey in Canadian higher education. It is known that international student experience is a complex and multidimensional issue and is influenced by various fixed or unfixed factors that vary at individual and national levels. Drawing on Jones's classification of international student experience (i.e., academic, pastoral/living, social experience) and the factors affecting these types of experience (i.e., personal, familial, institutional, and national milieus), the qualitative research method, namely in-depth interview, was used to acquire detailed knowledge about the issue by using the purposive sampling technique. The findings of this study basically indicate that personal, institutional, and national dimensions have a strong effect on the experience of international Turkish students in Canadian higher education.

INTRODUCTION

According to statistics reported by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2019), the number of international students in higher education worldwide has greatly expanded in the past few decades, increasing from 2 million in 1998 to 5.3 million in 2017. Drawing on multidimensional factors related to the globalization of higher education, this massive international mobility has been addressed by different disciplines such as education, international relations, politics, economics, psychology, and sociology. The findings of previous studies in different disciplines point at numerous reasons for this international student flow/mobility which can be categorized from different perspectives as “push-pull factors” or “domestic-external factors.” It is possible to state these factors in general terms as follows: increasing demand for highly skilled labour by knowledge-based and innovation-driven

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economies across the world, insufficient capacity to meet this growing demand, getting a high-paid job, working permanently in the receiving/host country, employability in the globalized labour market, political and economic stability of countries, cultural differences and/or similarities between host and sending countries so forth (Abbott & Silles, 2016; Dreher & Poutvaara, 2005; Findlay et al., 2012; Perkins & Neumayer, 2014; UNESCO, 2013). It seems that every part of the international student mobility process (from the individual to the global world) offers different challenges and benefits in terms of human capital, integration, and socioeconomic development.

The general trend for international students is to study in English-speaking countries. According to official figures, more than 40% of all mobile students in the OECD and partner countries have been studying in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada in decreasing order of number of students (OECD, 2019). Besides linguistic and socioeconomic factors, Canada as an important receiving country is attractive to students for the opportunity to work during and after study (CBIE, 2018a; Lu et al., 2015) as well as to obtain permanent residency. For instance, approximately one-quarter of international students who arrived in the 1990s and 2000s became permanent residents within 10 years after their first study permit (Hou & Lu, 2017). Additionally, the number of registered international students in Canada has been gradually rising since 2014 (34%) (CBIE, 2018b). All these indicate that Canada plays an important role in international student mobility/flow processes across the world.

Canada's international student population in 2017 consisted of 494,524 registered students at all levels of study. These students are 28% from China, 25% from India, 5% from South Korea, 4% from France, 3% from the USA, 2% from Nigeria, 1% from Pakistan, 1% from Turkey, 1% from Hong Kong, 1% from Taiwan, and so forth (CBIE, 2018b). It is evident that Canada has a diverse international student population. Therefore, each study on these students coming from different countries would be valuable for candidates and Canada alike because of the heterogeneity of the international student population, which is expected to increase across the world in the next decades (Brown, 2004; Chapman, 1999; Lu & Hou, 2015). Overall, more research would be helpful in enhancing our understanding of some of difficulties students may face, such as language and adaptation problems, academic and financial difficulties, cultural challenges, and social exclusion (Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2010). Additionally, international student is too broad a conceptualization to understand students coming from diverse national, cultural, and social backgrounds (Hanassab, 2006). Due to the under-exploration of studies on any international minority group in Canada, studies about this group would be valuable to make both students and their experiences visible and give them a voice as well as foster inclusive policies. As a first step towards filling this gap in the literature, this exploratory study will focus on students coming from Turkey as one of the minority international groups.

This chapter, which consists of four parts, explores and discusses the experience of students from Turkey in Canadian higher education, specifically universities. In the first part, the theoretical framework of the experience of international students will be introduced. In the next part, the method and research process of the study will be defined. In this part, the design of the study, including sampling, data collection procedure, and limitations of the study, will be presented in detail. The third part will present the main findings and discussions based on the theoretical framework. In the last part, the findings and suggestions for further studies will be assessed.

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