

## RETURN MIGRATION OF ETHNIC TURKISH YOUTH TO TURKISH UNIVERSITIES

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We examined the return migration of ethnic Turkish youth who were living in European countries to universities in Turkey. We conducted semistructured interviews with 27 students who had come to Turkey from Western European countries to attend university. We found that the education system of the host country was more difficult for participants than Turkey's education system. Cultural capital, which includes parental higher education expectations, ethnic native and host country language skills, and ethnic culture, affected participants' return migration decision making. Social capital, involving previous visits to see relatives in Turkey, also affected this decision. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed.

*Keywords:* Turkish migrant students, cultural capital, social capital, ethnic Turkish youth, universities in Turkey, European education system.

The mass labor migration from Turkey to Western Europe of the 1950s and 1960s is one of the largest migrations of the 20th century (Gökdere, 1978). During the migration period, Turkey signed bilateral agreements with the Federal Republic of Germany (1961), Austria (1964), France (1965), and Sweden (1967; Gökdere, 1978). Since then, the Turkish population in Western Europe has increased to about four million (Abadan-Unat, 2002). Turkish migrants now experience significant problems related to unemployment and youth education in the Western European host countries (Maes, Stevens, & Verkuyten, 2014). According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

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and European Union (2015), migrants are underrepresented in higher education, particularly in France, Denmark, and Spain, and relatively few children of migrants have a university education in Germany and Austria.

Bourdieu's cultural capital, social capital, and social reproduction theories are commonly used to explain why members of disadvantaged groups achieve less educational success than those of advantaged groups. These theories are also used to explain the role of native language differences in socioeconomic status and reproduction of social classes (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986; Feliciano, 2005; Modood, 2004; Shin, 2014). For example, in terms of *social capital* and *social reproduction*, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds find the school environment different from their home environment and lack the social capital necessary to fit in as well as students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds do (Bourdieu, 1984). Further, although children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and other disadvantaged groups may acquire the knowledge necessary to succeed in school, they are less likely to achieve the same natural familiarity that middle- and upper-class students have, and thus are more likely to fail academically (Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999). Children from migrant families struggle to make academic progress (King & Christou, 2008), and there are problems with economic and education systems associated with their education (Hillmert, 2013). Further, limited finance impedes the access of the children of migrants to educational resources (Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 1997), and, therefore migrant children seem to be disadvantaged compared with children of the host country.

Children of immigrants are exposed to *cultural capital* in both their families and communities. For example, immigrant parents have higher education expectations than parents who are native to the host country (Glick & White, 2004), and parental education expectations are positively related to those of their children (Goyette, 2008). Immigrants believe that higher education is the most likely pathway to socioeconomic mobility, and consequently, there are more educational obligations on their children (Crul, Schneider, Keskiner, & Lelie, 2017; Feliciano & Lanuza, 2016).

Migration, social and cultural capital, adaptation, and return migration are factors usually considered by researchers in studies related to student movement for university education (Altbach, 2004; Pérez & McDonough, 2008; Waters, 2006). For example, Altbach (2004) explained the increasing number of students choosing to study abroad with the use of push factors (such as a lack of programs in their preferred field and a limited quota at universities at home) and pull factors (particularly, easy access to university education and higher international standards of education). Researchers have also emphasized the importance of the family's role in the decision for university education in a foreign country (Pérez & McDonough, 2008; Waters, 2006). According to Waters' (2006) study among

Hong Kong students living in Canada, youth migrated for educational purposes with the support of their families when they thought that they could not continue secondary education in the national education system or if there was a limited quota in their preferred universities. In other words, parental higher education expectations are associated with the encouragement of students to migrate initially or to stay in the host country. If academic achievement is difficult in the host country, owing to cultural barriers, the cultural capital of parental higher education expectations has the opposite effect and encourages return migration. To quantify the choice of Latino and Latina students to go to Los Angeles for their college education, Pérez and McDonough (2008) observed that social capital is also important, because family members and relatives have a significant effect on students' decisions.

Although many researchers have examined students' emigration from underdeveloped or developing countries to developed countries for university education and the reasons for their emigration, return migration is a relatively neglected issue. It is notable that between 2008 and 2013, the total number of people who left Germany was higher than the total number who migrated to Germany (Pusch & Splitt, 2013). According to the German Office for National Statistics, in 2014, the number of people who migrated to Germany was 1,464,724 and the number who left was 914,000 ([de.statista.com](http://de.statista.com)), and about 30,000 Turks have remigrated to Turkey during the past few years ([de.statista.com](http://de.statista.com)). In addition, according to a survey conducted with 4,051 Turkish migrants who were spending their summer holiday in Turkey, 60% stated that they wanted their children to live and have a university education in Turkey (Küçükcan, 2011). Although previous researchers have explored the preferences of children of Turkish immigrants toward attending a university in their host country (Kristen, Reimer, & Kogan, 2008), their preferences toward a university education in overseas universities and in their parents' country of origin are not known. We therefore investigated the decision of Turkish students from immigrant families long settled in European countries to return to Turkey to obtain a university education. Our research questions were as follows:

**Research Question 1:** Why do ethnic Turkish youth living in Western Europe decide to attend university in Turkey?

**Research Question 2:** What do these ethnic Turkish students think about university education in Western European countries?

## Method

We used grounded theory, which is used when little is known about the topic (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As the theory develops, codes emerge through the data analysis (i.e., a data-driven process). We employed the systematic approach of Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998).

### Participants and Procedure

We used the theoretical sampling approach of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998) to select participants. They were sons and daughters of Turkish immigrant families living in Western Europe, and they attended Hacettepe University in Ankara, Turkey. We obtained a list of ethnic Turkish students from immigrant families living abroad from the Head of Student Affairs at Hacettepe University. We determined the sample size by data saturation according to the theoretical sampling approach. Of the students who were contacted, 27 volunteered (17 women, 10 men) to participate. Participants were studying in the departments of German Philology, English Philology, and French Translation and Interpreting. Of the families of the participants, 20 lived in Germany, four in France, two in Switzerland, and one in Austria. The age range of the participants was 18–26 years ( $M = 22.8$ ,  $SD = 3.4$ ). They were all second-generation migrants, born in the host country and educated there until they went to university, and the highest level of education of their parents was secondary school.

### Data Analysis

We conducted semistructured interviews using open-ended questions concerning demographics, migration, and decisions about their university education. Permission was first obtained from the Ethics Commission of Hacettepe University. Interviews were then recorded on tape with participant approval, after which the audio records were transcribed into a Microsoft Word document. Data collection and analysis were conducted simultaneously according to grounded theory. We used inductive analysis, a process in which themes are allowed to emerge from the data instead of the data being fitted into a preexisting code frame. This analysis is used when the identified themes are strongly linked to the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 1990).

We used the constant comparison method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998) to analyze the data. As the data are reviewed, the specifications of codes are developed and refined to fit the data, in an initial open coding. The goal of open coding is to generate as many codes as possible, without much consideration of how they relate to one another. In this study, data were classified as short sequences of word. We then compared text segments and recombined codes and themes as axial coding. Finally, the themes were determined by selective codification to form the overall story. Data collection was complete when we had extracted the maximum number of themes. We used NVivo 10 software for data analysis, and pseudonyms to ensure participants' confidentiality. In addition, to supplement the qualitative data, we recoded some data and used Likert-type rating scales for some of the cultural and social pressures. We used correlation analysis to search for associations between demographics, perceived language proficiency, and the push and pull factors that participants reported.

Table 1. Correlations Among Demographics, Perceived Language Proficiency, and Push and Pull Factors of Students

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Gender												
2. Age												
3. Length of time spent in the host country												
4. Perceived Turkish proficiency												
5. Perceived host language proficiency												
6. Citizenship												
7. Push factor: Difficulties with the European education system												
8. Push factor: Cultural capital of criticism for speaking different language at home and at school												
9. Pull factor: Cultural capital of the host country language												
10. Pull factor: Cultural capital of ethnic native language and culture												
11. Pull factor: Cultural capital of parental higher educational expectations												
12. Pull factor: Having the opportunity to be more successful in Turkey												

Note. Correlations are shown in **bold**.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ .

## Results

We identified three significant themes involved in participants' decision making to obtain a university education in Turkey: cultural capital, social capital, and difficulties with the European education system.

### **Cultural Capital and Choosing a University Education in Turkey**

Participants discussed the effects of parental higher education expectations, criticism for speaking a different language at home and at school, the host country language, and their ethnic native language as cultural capital transferred from their families on their decision to obtain a university education in their home country. Of the 27 participants, 24 reported that parental higher education expectations played an important role in their decision to attend a Turkish university. Their families and relatives encouraged, pressured, or demanded (with no other option) that they study in Turkey. As Zafer's parents knew that he would be able to obtain a university education only in Turkey, they encouraged and pressured him to do so. He reported the role that his parents' higher education expectations played in his decision.

"We made a decision together, me and my family. I chose to attend university here [in Turkey] with the encouragement of my family. I could not go to university if I had stayed in Germany."

Nine participants stated that speaking a different language at home and at school was sometimes criticized by teachers and friends, and they felt ethnic discrimination. Akif expressed his feelings.

"Speaking different languages at home and school is interesting. I remember I was very upset when I went to school as a little child. I was the only Turkish child in the class, and my teacher and friends tried to find mistakes whenever I talked. Children can be cruel."

As these remarks show, speaking Turkish and having limited skills in the host country's main language can result in discrimination and disadvantage in the European education system. However, 21 participants mentioned that the Turkish language and culture had a positive impact on their decision to return to Turkey to attend university. We believe it is interesting that their ethnic native language and culture offered them some advantages, as expressed by Zahir.

"I can say that I grew from experiencing both cultures in Germany. Language was required to live and study here. My Turkish was not perfect but good enough. I also improved my Turkish here [Turkey]. My German is very good, and I am using it at my university because German is the language of instruction in our department."

In these 21 participants' experience, being bilingual and bicultural, despite living in Western Europe, made it easy to continue their education in Turkey, and their university education experience in Turkey presented them with opportunities and advantages that were unavailable to them in their host country.

### **Social Capital and Choosing a University Education in Turkey**

Twenty participants reported that having visited relatives in Turkey played an important role as social capital in their decision to attend university in Turkey. All participants reported that they had visited relatives in Turkey every year, and many stated that they preferred to attend a university in Turkey because they believed life was more attractive there. Ali described his experience.

“I was too bored in Germany. I mean, everything was the same. I wanted to change my life. We used to come to Turkey in the summer. I have many relatives here [in Turkey], and I like Turkey. Here, life is more enjoyable, like a festival. Because of this, I wanted to attend university here.”

Thus, social capital played an important role in participants’ decision to attend a university in Turkey.

### **Difficulties with the European Education System**

The education system of the host country was another reason that 17 participants chose to attend a university in Turkey. Further, immigrant identity exacerbated their struggle in the European education system. In other words, the educational systems in Western Europe may not be egalitarian owing to discriminatory attitudes from some teachers and peers. Zeynep described some problems.

“The system is too difficult there [Germany]. For example, if you want to take the graduation exam, you can take the exams in the fifth and sixth grades. But we cannot succeed since our German is not perfect. Even the Swiss students can hardly pass this exam. In addition to this, they discriminate against children of migrants. You see, it is very difficult.”

Five participants said that difficulties with university studies played an important role in their decision to attend a university in Turkey. Hasan described these difficulties.

“I wanted to study at a university in Turkey because I had enrolled in a university in Germany but I could not realize my dream since I was unable to pass even one class. I could not graduate. It is more difficult to study there.”

Seventeen participants said they had the opportunity to be more successful in Turkey. Fatma stated her feelings.

“I had the opportunity to study at a university in Germany, but there was incredible competition there. Because everyone speaks German, how many people can you compete with? There is not so much competition here [in Turkey]. It is very easy to study at a university here for students who come from Germany like me, because not everyone can speak German well. I can speak German perfectly, so I am at more of an advantage in the Department of German Philology.”

### Push and Pull Factors

We found that the pull factors of difficulties with the European education system and criticism for speaking a different language at home and at school, and the push factors of ethnic native language and culture, parental higher education expectations, and having the opportunity to be more successful in Turkey, were not related to demographic factors. The pull factor of having the opportunity to be more successful in Turkey was positively related to perceived Turkish proficiency ( $p < .01$ ), and the push factors of difficulties with the European education system ( $p < .01$ ) and criticism for speaking a different language at home and at school ( $p < .01$ ). The pull factor of the host country language as cultural capital was positively related to perceived host country language proficiency ( $p < .05$ ) and negatively related to perceived Turkish proficiency ( $p < .05$ ). The push factor of speaking a different language at home and at school as cultural capital was positively related to perceived Turkish proficiency ( $p < .05$ ) and negatively related to difficulties with the European education system ( $p < .05$ ). The push factor of criticism for speaking a different language at home and at school was positively related to another push factor of difficulties with the European education system ( $p < .01$ ).

### Discussion

We examined the return migration of ethnic Turkish youth living in European countries to Turkey to obtain a university education. Difficulties with the European education system and in communicating with students native to the host country, and discriminatory attitudes in the host country, were push factors. Pull factors were participants' cultural and social capital and the opportunity to be more successful in Turkey. Previous researchers have shown that push and pull factors and the family's role are important in making the decision to obtain university education in a foreign country (Altbach, 2004; Waters, 2006). The role of teachers and peer discriminatory attitudes parallel previous findings on the problems experienced by Turkish youth in Europe (D'hondt, Eccles, Van Houtte, & Stevens, 2017; Maes et al., 2014).

Cultural capital played a crucial role in participants' decision to pursue a university education in Turkey. Although speaking Turkish and having limited skills in the host country main language can be a disadvantage in the European education system, this can be advantageous in the Turkish education system. Cultural capital factors, such as speaking the native language of the country in which they attend university and speaking the host country language that is used for instruction in a department at a Turkish university, also influenced the higher education decision of participants. This is a key reason why many prefer return migration to Turkey to obtain a university education. In addition, we found that parental higher education expectations (as cultural capital) were an important

factor in participants' decisions to pursue a university education in Turkey. These results are similar to Feliciano and Lanuza's (2016) findings, which showed that migrant parents have unique cultural capital in their higher education expectations for their children in the host country. Further, we found that migrant parents expect their children to access university education in their home country if they cannot attend the university in the host community. All participants were accustomed to visiting Turkey every year to see relatives. This social capital gave them the perception that life was more attractive in Turkey, which affected their decision to attend a university in Turkey.

In addition, we recoded some variables (gender, age, length of time spent in the host country, perceived host language proficiency, perceived Turkish proficiency, and push and pull factors) as quantitative factors, and conducted correlation analysis. The results showed that the pull factor of having the opportunity to be more successful in Turkey was positively related to perceived Turkish proficiency, and the push factors of difficulties with the European education system, and criticism for speaking a different language at home and at school. The push factor of criticism for speaking a different language at home and at school was positively related to the push factor of difficulties dealing with the European education system. Future researchers comparing ethnic Turkish youth who pursue university studies in Western Europe with those who study in Turkey, can also compare the effects of family, language, homesickness, discrimination, and relational ties to Turkey on their higher education decision making.

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