THE OPPORTUNITIES, CHALLENGES AND FACTORS INFLUENCING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AT AKDENIZ UNIVERSITY, TURKEY

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Abstract:

The overall purpose of this study was to explore the opportunities and challenges international students faced in their daily life and factors influencing their academic performance at Akdeniz University, Antalya, Turkey. In this study, a case study design in accordance with the qualitative research method was used. The purpose of the case study is to draw conclusions about a particular case. The working group of this study contained 15 international students. The researchers developed a semi-structured interview form and ensured its validity by giving two academicians who were experts on the topic and then the pilot study was conducted. Firstly, participants reported that international students have faced great opportunities such as meeting new people, new culture, a new language, new links and so forth. Secondly, the obtained results showed that international students have faced language barriers, culture shock, local people, and difficulty of adaption and so on. Third, they also mentioned language barriers, psychological problems, professor-related factors, students' laziness, family issues, financial limitation, poor access to resources, academic background, lack of good accommodation, culture shock, and the difference in the education system as factors influencing their academic performance. Finally, the participants suggested other international students to have Turkish friends, be psychologically ready, and be active to learn and adapt, to focus on language seriously, to manage their time effectively, to participate in campus clubs and activities, to go with plans and to work hard.

Keywords: academic performance; international students; higher education

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1. Introduction

It is clear that education is a fundamental human right enshrined in all major United Nations and International Charters (Igwe, Didiamaka & Chidi, 2017). Education is an avenue of training and learning, especially in schools or university, to improve knowledge and develop skills (Mekonnen, 2014). Currently, many students worldwide leave their own country each year to study overseas to gain professional attributes and knowledge. There are many reasons that attract international students to study abroad such as economic, political, security and academic even though they face different challenges during their studies (Rajkhowa, 2014). The number of students who come to Turkey for the purpose of various education levels from different countries and different cultures is increasing. Often these students come from the countries in Balkan, Middle Eastern, Africa and Turkish Republics (Snoubar & Celik, 2013).

The total number of International students enrolled at Turkish universities for the educational year of 2016/2017 reached 103,727 individuals, with Afghani students leading with 15,036, students, Syria with 14,765 students and Turkmenistan with 10,642 students. Institutions affiliated with the Ministry of National Education host an additional 232,714 International students and temporary educational centers have an additional 459,521 students. That brings the total of International students studying in Turkey at 795,962 (Daily Sabah, May 4, 2017). The reasons for an increase of students in Turkey are due to its geopolitical, multicultural country and the high development and good quality of education (Çetinsaya, 2014; Titrek, Hashimi, Ali, & Nguluma, 2016).

International students are given the opportunity to experience real life through study trips where they can explore the traditions, customs, and social life of Turkish people. During their study, students develop their lifelong learning skills such as learning the Turkish language, history, ethnography, and culture, as well as formal and informal programmes and procedures. The knowledge they gain during their language preparation course helps them share their experiences with the students at the university and other people in their daily social life. However, it provides them with more experience, but also to make them more aware of the challenges that they might be faced with in their daily lives (Titrek, Hashimi, Ali, & Nguluma, 2016).

Even if International students have faced many opportunities or positive things, they also experienced challenges during their study. It is not surprising that there are many complex challenges facing International students particularly if their home country culture is strikingly different from the host country culture (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001). A phenomenological study at Sakarya University in Turkey to investigate challenges faced by international students reported that students have challenges in communication, at the language centre, accommodation, the environment, cultural issues, health, and social interaction activities (Titrek, Hashimi, Ali, & Nguluma, 2016). A study showed that adjustment challenges are primarily attributable to English language proficiency and culture (Andrade, 2006). Other studies also showed that cultural stress is an obvious challenge to the well-being of international students. These

international students provide evidence of feelings of discomfort, dislocation, and distress but their responses are, for the most part, not at an extreme level. The distress and homesickness that is experienced by missing family, friends and the familiar things of home when in another country is to be expected. This was a key aspect of cultural stress experienced by about half the students. Cultural stress is negatively related to social connectedness and lifestyle balance but positively related to depression, anxiety, and stress (Thomson and Rosenthal, 2006).

Factors influencing international students' adjustment to the host culture include background and situational variables such as the difference between the culture of origin and host culture, language proficiency, gender, age, education level, status, self-esteem, and prior cross-cultural experience, length of stay, the information and support provided, social interaction with host nationals, networking with co-cultural, academic or professional performance and physical health (Adler, 1975; Ward & Rana-Dueba, 1999).

A study showed that the challenges of international students classified into culture shock, language difficulties, adjustment to customs and values, isolation and loneliness, homesickness, differences in the educational system, and loss of their established social network (Rawjee & Reddy, 2012).

The US News (2015) reported that there are six common challenges facing international students in America, which are new assignments, new professors, new food, a new culture, new subjects, and new friends. Le AT, LaCost & Wismer (2016) the majority of international students have to deal with additional challenges such as language barriers and culture gaps. International students are at risk of developing mental health problems due to the loss of support systems and acculturation stress (Maclachlan and Justice, 2009). Another study also showed that mental health problems such as depression, psychosomatic complaints, anxiety, and paranoid reactions are the greatest challenges faced by international students. This leads international student, on their return home, to find themselves feeling frustrated because of the vast differences between their overseas training and the reality of their home countries (Robinson 2009). Singh, Zhao,& Hu (2003) including racial discrimination, changes in their role and status, weather and food differences, language, accommodation, separation from home, dietary restrictions, money, diminished social discrimination, and different educational systems. Another study also showed that social, cultural, academical and financial challenges faced by the Turkish Scholarship granted international students in Turkey. In other words, it specifically looked at the problems of the students about their social interaction capabilities, cultural adaption and financial problems including challenges faced both in academic and daily life (Ercan, 2012).

Many studies are carried out across the globe to explore factors influencing academic achievement of students (Hijazi & Naqvi, 2006; Mersha et al., 2009; Mekonnen, 2014; Tiruneh & Petros, 2014). These students experience various problems in adapting to Turkish culture as a new way of life and this has the negative impact on the educational success of the international students in Turkey (Snoubar & Celik, 2013). It is not surprising that the physical and psychological well-being of students, as well as their

academic performance, can be affected by these adjustment challenges (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001). Academic performance of students is affected by language proficiency, academic skills, and educational background. Understanding international student adjustment issues have global implications for intercultural education (Andrade, 2006). A study in Turkey showed that student background, self-related cognitions, learning strategies and school-climate are the major factors influencing students' academic performance (Demir, Kılıç and Depren, 2009). A study conducted by Hijazi and Naqvi (2006) also showed that student performance is associated with students' profile consisted of his attitude towards attendance in classes, time allocation for studies, parents' level of income and mother's age. This is universally true that good leadership styles important for improving the academic achievement of students. Meta-analysis over 70 studies by Waters et al (2003) demonstrated that there is, in fact, a substantial relationship between leadership and student achievement. That is, just as leaders can have a positive impact on achievement, they also can have a marginal, or worse, a negative impact on achievement. Each of the students has his/her own culture; that is why, in this study, the researchers want to identify the opportunities, challenges, and factors that affect international students' academic performance qualitatively at Akdeniz University in the Republic of Turkey. Researchers also international students at Akdeniz University.

The purpose of this study was to explore the opportunities and challenges International students faced in their daily life and factors influencing their academic performance at Akdeniz University, Turkey. To achieve this general objective, the researchers raised the following research questions:

1) What are the opportunities International students faced in their daily life in Antalya?
2) What are the challenges International students faced in their daily life in Antalya?
3) What are the factors influencing International students' academic performance at Akdeniz University?
4) What are the International students' suggestions for other International students regarding ways of improving academic performance?

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design
This study employed an embedded single case study since the researchers collected the data from only one university and many faculties. The case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events (Yin, 2012). In addition, contexts are unique and dynamic; therefore, case studies investigate and report the complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relations and other factors in a unique instance (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

2.2 Working Group

All International students at Akdeniz University in Turkey are the target population of this study. Akdeniz University has 1,876 international students. Data were collected through interview with maximum variation sampling from a total fifteen international students (from fourteen nationalities). This allowed the researchers for the differing and somewhat similar perspectives of each group to emerge and for comparison and at the same time commonality in the analysis to occur.

2.3 Data Gathering Instruments

In this study, in order to collect data, a semi-structured interview was employed. Because semi-structured interviews would provide an in-depth exploration of the topic, allowed the researchers to change the order of questions, simplify the questions and to probe the interviews (Cohen et al., 2007).

2.4 Data Analysis Techniques

Qualitative data collected through interviews was analyzed by using NVivo version 10. The NVIVO does not perform the analysis but only supports the researcher doing the analysis by organizing data and so on (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Based on this program, the analysis will be carried out in six steps (Adu, 2016). First, the researcher will conduct the data cleaning by using paragraph style. It makes us easy to employ 'auto code' for grouping data according to the research questions. Second, the researcher will upload the data into NVivo. Third, the researcher will reorganize the data by grouping data based on the research questions. Fourth, the researcher will conduct data exploration (using "Query command") to find the words or phrases that respond to the research questions. Then, the researcher will begin coding relevant information. Fifth, the researcher will generate themes to address the research questions. Finally, the frequency will be computed.

2.5 Validity, Reliability and Ethical Consideration

Prior to data collection, the researchers sought approval to conduct research in the specified area and to explicitly seek the consent of participants who were involved in this research and to ensure, as their response will be kept confidential, the purpose of the study was explained.

The participants were also informed that they could discontinue their participation at any time. Each participant was contacted, and a convenient location and time were determined for the interview. Prior to the interview, the researchers were asked the participants to sign a consent form.

Reliability relates to being consistent over time with methods and treating all groups the same when gathering data. Validity is achieved when the researcher's data gathering relates to the concept being studied so it is in line with the actual research aim (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). In order to establish reliability and validity within this study, the following steps were implemented. Prior to interviewing, the researchers

checked both sets of interview questions against the aim and key questions. After that, the researchers gave interview questions to two academics who were experts on the topic to ensure its content validity. In order to ensure whether the participants can understand the question or not, a field-test with two international students was carried out.

3. Findings

This chapter presented an analysis of the data collected through the interview of Akdeniz University's international students. All the fifteen participants were from Akdeniz University in Turkey. This chapter organized their responses based on research questions-first, the opportunities international students faced in their daily life; second, the challenges international students faced in their daily life as a International student in Antalya; third, the factors influencing international students' academic performance; and finally, international students' suggestions for other International students regarding ways of improving academic performance were presented.

To do these, NVIVO was employed in the analyses of the variables under consideration. It was organized into four main parts.

Table 1: Background information of the international students

International students	Gender	Country	Faculty	Year of study	Level of education
A	M	Cambodia	Education	3	PhD
B	M	Rwandan	Agriculture	3	PhD
C	M	South Sudan	Engineering	2	Undergraduate
D	M	Sierra Leone	Communication	2	MA
E	M	Ethiopia	Engineering	2	Undergraduate
F	F	Nippe	EAS	2	Undergraduate
G	M	Rwanda	Engineering	2	Undergraduate
H	M	Yemen	EAS	2	Undergraduate
I	M	Azerbaijan	Letter	3	PhD
K	M	Ethiopia	Agriculture	1	PhD
L	M	Ghana	Agriculture	2	PhD
M	M	Syrian	Architecture	4	Undergraduate
N	M	Uzbekistan	Medicine	1	Undergraduate
O	M	Algeria	Communication	2	MA

Note: EAS=Economics and Administrative Sciences

As shown in table 1, the researchers collected data from various fourteen nationalities such as Cambodia, Rwandan, South Sudan, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, and Nippe and so on. In addition, the data collected from both genders and different academic levels.

3.1 The opportunities international students faced in their daily life
At the beginning of the interview, students were asked about the opportunities they faced in their daily life and follow up questions related to this. Then, their views were given in table 2.

Table 2: International students' views about the opportunities they faced in their daily life

Themes	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	N
Meeting new people		✓	✓	✓	✓								✓	✓	✓	7
Experiencing new culture						✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓		6
Learning the new language						✓	✓				✓		✓			4
Getting good job opportunities								✓					✓		✓	3
Getting quality education	✓	✓									✓					3
Accessing good accommodation	✓										✓					2
Creating new links			✓									✓				2
Getting various qualified professors	✓												✓			2
Participating in different conferences and clubs										✓			✓			2
Widening horizon				✓				✓								2
Having the good career in the future													✓			1

Table 2 summarized the categorization of responses based on Akdeniz University's international students' views about the opportunities they faced in their daily life in Antalya. As showed, the responses were classified into eleven main themes. Nearly half of international students reported that meeting with new people is the main opportunities they faced in Antalya. International students' views in-depth showed below:

a. Meeting new people
Among the opportunities international students have had while studying as a International student in Antalya was getting a chance to know people from all over the world, to meet and introduce to each other and to make new friends since Antalya is a touristic city that offers many opportunities to meet people from different nationalities. International students' opinions on the subject were directly cited below.

Student C, for example, stated, "*Antalya is an international city where visitors come from different part of the world for varying purposes. Endowed with the advantage of International language; it can be easy to be called as the guide to the visitors. This change would enhance exposure and friendship with people of different countries*". Student M also reported that "*Akdeniz University organizing special ceremonies for the international students; thus, create a good chance for International students to meet and introduce to each other*".

b. Experiencing new culture
Knowing different new cultures and environments are experiencing new culture-related opportunities for international students. For example, student I stated that "*Here when I was studying Turkish preparatory course, I had the opportunities to learn and meet the culture of different nationalities*". Another student also reported directly as "*Every day I meet new international students from different nationalities of five continents and that means for me learning about and new cultures and civilizations*" (Student M).

c. Learning the new language
Learning a new language is another opportunity mentioned by international students. Not only Turkish, being an international student also offers a chance to learn and improve other languages. For example, student M stated that "*I have benefited from the Exchange*

programmes that Akdeniz University offers it to all the students (e.g. Erasmus +). Erasmus+ was a great chance to travel and explore Europe for more than two months. When I was in my country, I did not know that there are such exchange programmes for the students. By applying to exchange programmes, I have improved my language skills and educational achievements".

d. Getting good job opportunities

There are many tourist areas and employment opportunities in Antalya especially in the field of tourism. Therefore, students reported that Antalya is a good place to get the part-time job even if it is difficult to get the work permit. Student H, for example, stated, "*I think knowing Russian is also a great job opportunity in Antalya. Moreover, there are many students like me from post-soviet countries and negotiating with them in Russian is easy*".

e. Getting quality Education

International students also reported that getting a quality of education is another main opportunity they have got in Antalya. These include good internet facility and a good educational system. Accessing good accommodation, additionally, international students reported that Antalya has the good and modern infrastructure and good accommodation.

f. Creating new links

Being an international student would enhance exposure and friendship with people of different countries. This opens the opportunity to create new links and new friends (Student L).

g. Getting various qualified professors

Students also reported that they have got highly knowledgeable professors with a lot of new learning methods.

h. Participating in different conferences and clubs

One International student also reported, "*As an international student, I can participate in academic clubs, social organizations of University. This is a great opportunity for me to practice my Turkish, as well as meet new students and make new relationships*".

i. Widening horizon

International students also mentioned that their horizons are increased because of students see things and life from different perspectives with the help of an indication of different countries. This has been more explained by a participant, for example, changing ideas and thoughts about education and religion after coming here (student I). "*Having good career in the future- finally, an international student also reported that, studying here would offer him many opportunities for his career in the future*" (Student M).

3.2 The challenges international students faced in their daily life

This part presented international students' views about the challenges they faced in their daily life in Antalya.

Table 3: International students' views about the challenges they faced in their daily life

Themes	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	N
Language barriers	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	13
Culture shock	✓	✓		✓	✓				✓							5
Local people	✓		✓			✓			✓						✓	5
Difficulty of adaption			✓				✓		✓					✓		4
Financial limitations					✓	✓										2
Terrorist attacks						✓		✓								2
Lack of empathy from professors												✓				1
Low local currency															✓	1
Management system		✓														1
Psychological problems										✓						1

As shown in Table 3, international students' views on the challenges they faced in Antalya were categorized into ten main themes. Almost all participants mentioned the language barrier as the major challenge they faced while staying in Antalya as the International student. They have also reported the unique challenges they faced. Here are the overall challenges they mentioned in the interview:

a. Language barriers

The main challenge that the majority of international students have faced in their daily life in Antalya was the language barrier. As they expressed, it is very difficult for learning the language within a year and receiving an education in that language. This challenge is more difficult for international students since most of the Turkish people do not speak English. This has been more explained by two students, for example, "*We are faced with a situation where the new language seems to limit us from usage of the potentials we have*" (Student C); and "*For me at the first time I came to Antalya was the communication for sure. It was very hard to explain something you need for a person who can't speak any language except his mother tongue, which I didn't know anything about, accept some daily chat expressions*" (Student M).

b. Culture shock

International students have faced cultural shocks because of the national culture variance, differences in language, food, weather, dress, education system, technology, and transportation. For example, two student students described as follows:

Student A, for example, stated, "*Particularly, the Turkish culture is very different from mine so the food, the pattern of behavior, and way of understanding each other are not the same. The first time I arrived here, I faced many cultural shocks*". Another student also added, "*Female students are not covered here in Antalya, however, in my country, the female is covered with the scarf. This one challenge for me*" (Student I).

c. Local people

International student also attributed the challenge to the local people. They reported that most Turks do not know International languages; thus, they do not deal well with Internationalers.

Let us see in-depth what participants were reported: "*Most of the cases, they usually ask us about the sensitive question of religion. After knowing my religion, some ignore me and some still want to continue communicating with me*" (Student A). Other student also reported, "*Sometimes you may find ignorant people who tend to ask silly questions about your identity and the country of origin. These behaviours are really possible to ignore but their impacts on our motions and mental culture is long-lasting*" (Student C). Other international student expressed as "*People who are Christian like me may gain a variety of anxieties since most people ask us about our religion. Here they may not ask us about our religion for the purpose prejudices, but I feel anxieties*" (Student G).

d. Difficulty of adaption

Another challenge the international students have faced was a difficulty of adjusting to a new life and culture. One student, for example, expressed as follows: "*Coming from a society which has its own norms and habits of life to a new society with repelling culture, is a very staunch difficulty. It takes one hard time to fully get absorbed and fully incorporated to the state of affairs, sometimes impossible to happen. This is because we are bored and subjected to a different environment whose effect becomes part of us*" (Student C).

e. Financial limitations

Insufficient of scholarship fee was also another challenge for international student in Antalya. An international student expressed his view as "*As I scholarship holder, I receive money every month, but at the end of each month, I am still in debt*" (Student F).

f. Terrorist attacks

As an international student in Turkey, terrorist attacks were also a challenge for the last years. This creates psychological stress on International students. Student G, for example, described it as "*Terrorist attacks have been increasing in the last years, especially in Turkey. Now it seems to calm down. This attack on the people living in Turkey, security forces, democracy, peace, political and economic stability are targeted. There are not any attacks here in Antalya within my stay for three years, but I have felt stress about the issue since there were many attacks in Ankara and Istanbul cities*".

g. Lack of empathy from professors

An international student reported it as "*…in the classroom, I was worry that understanding teachers will be hard and that was sure because the teachers don't differentiate between the International and local student*".

h. Low local currency

An international student also reported that getting low of Turkish lira against Dollar and Euro every day was added burden on the international student.

i. Management system

Student A described it, as "*Management system is complicated for Internationalers, especially staying documents, because Turkey is the high-centralized country*".

j. Psychological problems

Student J also reported that he experienced daily emotional crisis related to his families back home.

3.3 The factors influencing international students' academic performance

This part presented international students' views about the factors influencing their academic performance.

Table 4: International students' views about the factors influencing their academic performance

Themes	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	N
Language barriers	✓				✓	✓			✓			✓				5
Psychological problems					✓				✓				✓	✓		4
Professor-related factors	✓								✓					✓		3
Positively influenced factors	✓		✓										✓			3
Students' laziness			✓	✓					✓							3
Family issues		✓								✓						2
Financial limitations		✓				✓										2
Lack of adequate resources								✓				✓				2
Academic background		✓														1
Lack of good accommodation		✓														1
Culture shock							✓									1
Difference in the education system							✓									1
Health problems														✓		1
Poor time management													✓			1

As shown in table 4, international students' views about the factors influencing their academic performance were classified into fourteen themes. Among the themes, five of fifteen international students attributed the factors to language. Furthermore, their responses were shortly presented below:

a. Language barriers

As international student described the medium of instruction affects international students' academic performance since the medium of instruction at Akdeniz University is Turkish. Student-E described his view, as "*It can be very frustrating to fully understand a concept but be unable to express it satisfactorily in Turkish*". In addition to this, another student stated that "*the medium of the instruction affects my performance*" (student I).

b. Psychological problems

International students stated, self-concept, self-efficacy, stress caused by studies and the separation students from home country lead them to experience different psychological problems; thus, in turn, affect students' academic performance.

c. Professor-related factors

Professors' approach to students and teaching methods are important factors influencing students' academic performance. However, student A described it as "*Most of the Turkish professors and other staff do not want to speak English even they know it*". Student I also stated, "*If professors do not know how to catch the attention of a student, the more the student cannot make he or herself attentive to that subject*".

d. Positively influenced factors

International students also mentioned the university environment, free internet service and entertainment as the positive factor influencing their academic performance. An international student A reported, "*University facilities such as buildings, laboratories, internet accessibilities library are good enough*". He also added professors are highly knowledgeable, somehow understandable, and friendly to the students in the university. Other student added "*Free internet service ''eduroam'' and the entertainment locals such as sports courts, pools, theaters, bazaars, Etc. of Akdeniz University give a chance to me to follow my hobbies and have fun that I believe it affects the academic performance of any student*"(student M).

e. Students' laziness

Another factor influencing international students' academic performance was students' hard working and commitment level. Student-I, for example, stated, "The student gets laziness, irregular class attendance, lack of class attendance, lack of revision after class, and lack of class participation; and when students study only when there is a quiz or test, they do not well master the courses and get poor performance".

f. Family issues

Being away from their families and friends make international students feel lonely; thus, in turn, affect their academic achievement because it is very hard to focus on school while facing other social and emotional challenges.

g. Financial limitation

The lack of sufficient money is also another factor influencing students' academic performance.

h. Poor access to resources

The lack of adequate resources related to Literature and Architecture faculty affect students' academic performance.

Student H, for example, stated, "*There are no good bibliotheca and archives in Antalya*". Another student also added, "*As an interior architecture student I think the central library of Akdeniz University is poor of resources and there are not enough resources to do different researches*".

i. Academic background
An international student also attributed the cause to his academic background.

j. Lack of good accommodation
An international student also attributed the factor to lack of accommodation facilities since the number of students in a room more than four, which difficult to study.

k. Culture shock
Student G mentioned that "*culture shock has an impact on students' academic performance*".

l. The difference in the education system
The differences in the educational system between the home and the visited country also influence international students' academic performance

m. Health problems
Health problems mentioned as a factor that interferes with the overall performance of the student.

n. Poor time management
Students' time management also influenced their academic performance.

3.4 International students' suggestions for other International students regarding ways of improving academic performance
At the end of the interview, international students were asked about their suggestions for other International students regarding ways of improving academic performance. Their responses were given in the Table 5.

Table 5: International students' suggestions for other International students regarding ways of improving academic performance

Themes	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	N
Having Turkish friends	✓		✓	✓	✓								✓			5
Be psychologically ready			✓			✓							✓	✓		4
Be active to learn and adapt					✓	✓					✓					3
Focusing on language seriously		✓		✓							✓					3
Managing time effectively			✓		✓							✓				3
Participating in campus clubs and activities	✓				✓	✓										3
Going with plans		✓								✓						2
Working hard					✓							✓				2
Creating the good rapport with professors	✓															1
Engaging in scientific conferences															✓	1

Getting counseling service	✓	1
Selecting appropriate faculties	✓	1
Use International references	✓	1

As in Table 5 displayed international students' suggestion to other International students regarding ways of improving students' academic performance based on their experiences. Among these, in order to learn the Turkish language easily and within the short time, five international students suggested International students have Turkish friends. Here are their responses:

a. Having Turkish friends
Creating new Turkish friends is an important means to learn the Turkish language in a good and fast way. International students should friendlier to the Turkish people. Student E mentioned, "*The more a student speaks Turkish with his or her new friends, the easier it will become to understand his or her speech and to generate more of student own*".

b. Be psychologically ready
They also suggested to the International students to do not build any kind of scares in their minds. Student E reported, "*Don't be shy to ask help from others. You cannot be expected to know everything from the start by yourself. Mistakes are opportunities to learn from not reasons to give up. Even the most experienced professors probably made mistakes*".

c. Be active to learn and adapt
Participants also suggested to international students to try their best to learn the new language, new environment, and experience the different culture as quickly as possible. For in-depth, Student N stated, "*For all those who are planning to come to Turkey, I would like to say to everyone should understand of differences in culture, language and ways of life and jell in as quickly as they can possible to adjust to life in a new country*".

d. Focusing on language seriously
other suggestion for International students regarding ways of improving academic performance is to focus on and enhance the Turkish language since it is a medium of instruction at Akdeniz University. Student D, for example, described "*If you do not know the Turkish language, you can't do anything*".

e. Managing time effectively
It is an established reality that failure comes from an individual's use of their time and so does success. Therefore, they suggested that every international student must ask himself/herself why they are here.

f. Participating in campus clubs and activities

The students should participate in more cultural or entertainment events so that it allows the local and international students to interact with each other more closely (Student A, E, G).

g. Going with plans

International students should be set up proper mechanisms and strategies to integrate Turkish culture into their original culture.

h. Working hard

They also added in their speaking that, the international student should learn hard in order to improve their academic performance.

i. Creating the good rapport with professors

An international student suggested students to create the great rapport with professors to improve academic performance (Student A).

j. Engaging in scientific conferences

include engages in scientific clubs and visits other universities and participation in forums and seminars.

k. Getting counseling service

Student J mentioned, "*Use the on-campus counseling service is helpful for international students who struggle socially and emotionally. Utilizing the counseling service is a great way for international students to overcome this challenge*".

k. Selecting appropriate faculties

An international student H reported, "*I think International students have to choose the right faculty before starting their education at Akdeniz University. Tourism and medicine are the best faculties you can study at Akdeniz University*".

l. Use International references

Student O also added use International references as a means to improve students' academic performance.

4. Discussion

The present study attempted to identify the opportunities, challenges, and factors influencing international students' academic performance at Akdeniz University. As participants reported the opportunities includes meeting with new people, new culture, new language, new links and so forth. This finding consistent with a study conducted in the Turkey (Titrek, Hashimi, Ali, & Nguluma, 2016), that found students develop their

lifelong learning skills such as learning Turkish language, history, ethnography, and culture, as well as formal and informal programmes and procedures during their studies. The obtained results showed that international students faced language barriers, culture shock, local people, and difficulty of adaption, financial limitations, terrorist attacks, and lack of empathy from professors, low local currency, management system and psychological problems. This finding is congruent with study in the USA (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001; Maclachlan and Justice, 2009; Le AT, LaCost & Wismer 2016), Turkey (Ercan, 2012; Titrek, Hashimi, Ali, & Nguluma, 2016), UK (Andrade, 2006), in South Africa (Rawjee & Reddy, 2012). This study also in line with the study conducted by Thomson and Rosenthal (2006) which found psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, and stress as challenges for international students. Nearly with the present study, the US News (2015) reported that there are six common challenges facing international students in America, which are new assignments, new professors, new food, a new culture, new subjects, and new friends.

The findings of this research confirmed language barriers, psychological problems, professor-related factors, students' laziness, family issues, financial limitation, poor access of resources, academic background, lack of good accommodation, culture shock, difference in education system, health problems and poor time management were the factors influencing students' academic performance. This study is in line with the study of Ward, Bochner & Furnham, (2001); Andrade, (2006); Snoubar & Celik, (2013). They found that language proficiency, academic skills, and educational background. In addition, this finding is consistent with the results of another study that showed student background, self-related cognitions, learning strategies and school-climate are the major factors influencing students' academic performance (Demir, Kılıç, and Depren, 2009).

5. Conclusion, Implication and Recommendations

The overall aim of this study was to explore the opportunities and challenges International students faced in their daily life and factors influencing their academic performance at Akdeniz University. The researchers employed a qualitative research design and analysed with the help of NVIVO-11 plus software.

The researchers found from the study that international students have faced both good opportunities and challenges. The overall problem statement of this study is – the opportunities and challenges International students faced in their daily life and factors influencing their academic performance at Akdeniz University. To answer this major question, the researchers raised the following three sub-questions. Firstly, international students were asked about the opportunities they faced, and they reported meeting with new people, new culture, new language, new links and so forth. Secondly, the obtained results showed that international students faced language barriers, culture shock, local people, and difficulty of adaption and so on. Third, they also mentioned language barriers, psychological problems, professor-related factors, students' laziness, family issues, financial limitation, poor access of resources, academic background, lack of good

accommodation, culture shock, the difference in education system etc. as the factors influencing their academic performance. Finally, the participants suggested other international students have Turkish friends, be psychologically ready, be active to learn and adapt, to focus on language seriously, manage time effectively, to participate in campus clubs and activities, to go with plans and to work hard.

The findings of the study have implications for practice. Based on the findings, the researchers have made the following recommendations:

1) International students should find various ways to improve their academic performance.
2) The researchers also believed all suggestions recommended by internationals students should be considered and have been given credibility.
3) To tackle the language-related problems, international students should advocate and give their ears to the Turkish language.
4) A study needs to be carried out on all university community by asking more participants to see whether findings from the study will encounter with the ones from this research.
5) More comprehensive studies should be undertaken to include a larger population in order to establish whether the problem transcends other university.

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