Socio-Pedagogical Adaptation of Kazakh Students at Higher Education Universities in Türkiye: A Case Study At Gazi University

Balym Sanbayeva[1], Kamshat Yesenova[2], Lyazzat Beisenbayeva [3], Aknur Olzhayeva[*4], Kenzhegul Bizhanova[5]

Abstract

This study aims to examine the adaptation process of Kazakh students to educational institutions in Türkiye, identify the key factors enabling successful adaptation, and offer recommendations to improve support mechanisms for international students. Using a case study approach within qualitative research, participants were selected through purposive sampling based on nationality (Kazakh), educational level, and length of stay in Türkiye. Interviews were conducted with 13 students enrolled in TÖMER language courses at Gazi University during the 2023–2024 academic year, as well as 13 additional students in their third, fourth, and fifth years of undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral studies. Findings reveal that most Kazakh students adapted well to the Turkish educational environment, with language proficiency, sociocultural integration, and institutional support playing key roles. Strengthening language programs, organizing adaptation activities, and fostering cultural understanding are recommended to further support student adjustment. This study's This study contributes by contribution lies in its focus on Kazakh students' experiences and its practical recommendations for improving international education outcomes in Türkiye.

Keywords: *Intercultural communication, international education, Kazakh students, socio-pedagogical adaptation, Turkish, student support.*

Introduction

In recent years, global student mobility and international academic cooperation have significantly increased, leading more students to pursue education abroad in search of new educational and cultural experiences. Exchange programs such as he ERASMUS programme, which facilitates mobility among European universities; the MEVLANA programme, initiated by the Turkish

[1] PhD candidate, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Kazakhstan; sanbaeva.balim@mail.ru

[2] Assoc. Prof., Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Kazakhstan; kamchat_esenova@mail.ru

[3] L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Kazakhstan; tancopan@gmail.com

[4] Corresponding author, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Kazakhstan; aknur@mail.ru

[5] Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, Kazakhstan; k.bizhanova@inbox.r

Council of Higher Education to promote exchanges between Turkish and international institutions; and the ORHUN Exchange Programme, developed by the Organization of Turkic States to foster cooperation among Turkic-speaking countrieshave become popular avenues for students from diverse countries to study internationally and engage with different academic settings. However, this transition often presents various challenges in host countries. The socio-pedagogical adaptation process is complex and involves significant hurdles, including language barriers, cultural differences, social isolation, and adaptation-related stress (Gökyer, 2017; Nugmanova et al., 2024; Okunishi & Tanaka, 2023).

Internationalization of higher education has therefore become a significant research focus, as it reflects the broader challenge of how students adjust both academically and socially in foreign contexts. While global literature emphasizes the psychological and cultural aspects of adaptation (Berry, 1997; Wilson, 2011), less attention has been devoted to socio-pedagogical factors in specific host countries such as Türkiye.

It is essential for individuals to live, communicate, and meet their basic needs in ways that support their health and well-being within their environment. Those who migrate or relocate for educational or economic reasons often face challenges in adapting to new surroundings (Masud, 2020; Tamang & Shrestha, 2021). Searle and Ward (1990) define psychological adaptation as internal outcomes such as a strong sense of personal and cultural identity, good mental health, and satisfaction with the new environment (cited in Gökyer, 2017). Similarly, Berry's (1997) acculturation model views psychological adjustment as a state of well-being shaped by stress and stress management, influenced by both personal and social factors (cited in Gökyer, 2017). Bekmakhanova (1983), describes adaptation as the process and result of an individual's interaction with their social environment, where successful adaptation depends on one's ability to form effective relationships. Social and pedagogical adaptation is a multifaceted process involving the integration of individuals into society through education, encompassing social, psychological, and pedagogical dimensions (Nikitin, 2022). Pedagogical support should therefore engage families, society, and educational institutions, with a focus on developing specific knowledge, skills, values, and social roles (Nigmatullin et al., 2016; Yussupova & Tarman, 2025).

Despite the richness of these theoretical perspectives, there remains a gap in understanding how such frameworks apply to international students in Türkiye, particularly those from Kazakhstan. Previous studies (e.g., Gökyer, 2017; Troyanskaya, 2022) highlight challenges such as language,

financial issues, and cultural barriers, yet they do not specifically address the interplay between socio-cultural and pedagogical adaptation within Turkish higher education. This creates a critical research gap that situates the present study.

Theoretically, the study draws upon Berry's (1997) acculturation theory and Lewin's (1947) field theory, which together explain adaptation as both an individual psychological process and a dynamic interaction with the social environment. By embedding these theories in the analysis, the study establishes a foundation for linking adaptation challenges to institutional practices and student outcomes.

In recent years, global student mobility and international academic cooperation have expanded considerably, with more students pursuing education abroad through exchange programs such as MEVLANA, ERASMUS, and ORHUN. Although existing studies have examined challenges faced by international students—such as language barriers, cultural differences, social isolation, and adaptation stress (Bokayev, 2024; Gökyer, 2017; Okunishi & Tanaka, 2023) —most provide general insights and often overlook the specific socio-pedagogical contexts of host countries.

New studies focusing on the adaptation of international and intercultural students emphasize the psychological, educational, and sociocultural aspects of this process. Okunishi and Tanaka (2023) investigated the interpersonal and cultural adjustment difficulties faced by Japanese students studying in France, pinpointing assertiveness, sociability, and adaptability to different schedules as crucial elements impacting their intercultural communication. In a similar vein, Bokayev (2024) conducted a systematic review on the socialization of international students in the United States, emphasizing how language barriers, acculturation stress, and discrimination shape students' integration experiences.

In the Kazakhstani context, Tajibayeva et al. (2025) a study investigated the connection between pedagogical skills and psychological well-being in forecasting how well repatriate students adapt to university life, uncovering significant variations based on gender and academic standing. Furthermore, the study by Yussupova et al. (2023) underscored the importance of developing global citizenship competencies through educational reforms and the internationalization of higher education.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate that students' adaptation processes are multifaceted, shaped by personal resilience, institutional support, and intercultural competence. However, socio-pedagogical aspects of adaptation—particularly in host countries such as Türkiye—remain

underexplored. For instance, Searle and Ward's (1990) concept of psychological adaptation and Berry's (1997) acculturation model emphasize psychological well-being but fail to capture the nuanced sociocultural experiences of students in Türkiye. Likewise, while Bekmakhanova (1983) and Nikitin (2022) investigate the social and pedagogical dimensions of adaptation, their studies remain largely theoretical and lack empirical evidence from Turkish higher education contexts. Nigmatullin et al. (2016) further stress the importance of pedagogical support in social adaptation; however, limited research exists on how such support is practically implemented in Turkish universities.

Taken together, these studies highlight key aspects of student adaptation but fail to address the specific challenges faced by Kazakh students in Turkish universities, particularly the dual demands of linguistic and socio-cultural integration. This reveals a critical gap in the literature, as most existing research remains theoretical and lacks context-specific analysis. To address this shortcoming, the present study offers empirical insights and practical recommendations aimed at improving the socio-pedagogical adaptation of Kazakh students within the Turkish higher education system.

Adaptation is understood as a social process in which the individual functions as an adaptive system within the social environment and actively engages in social integration (Dossanova & Abdikadyr, 2021; Kuzembayeva et al., 2024). This process involves not only the individual's capacity to adjust to new cultural and social norms but also their ability to contribute positively to the social structure they enter. For example, international students adapting to a new educational setting must navigate language barriers and cultural differences while forming relationships and participating in academic and social activities, thus becoming active members of their new environment (Mutongoza & Olawale, 2023; Ndiangui et al., 2024).

Although theoretical literature conceptualizes adaptation as a multidimensional process involving social, psychological, and pedagogical dimensions, it is equally crucial to examine how these insights are reflected in real-world contexts. In Türkiye, where the number of international students in higher education continues to rise, the challenges of adaptation take on distinct forms shaped by the country's unique cultural, social, and institutional settings.

International students from diverse countries who pursue higher education in Türkiye often face a range of challenges related to accommodation, healthcare, transportation, education, language barriers, financial constraints, homesickness, and psychological, social, and cultural differences—

including social norms, food, clothing, religious practices, leisure activities, and gender relations. These factors can adversely affect students' academic performance and overall success (Gökyer, 2017). A study by Deressa & Beavers (1988)   further identified financial difficulties as the most important challenge experienced by international students (Kıroğlu et al., 2010: 27).

Language proficiency is a critical factor affecting both educational outcomes and living conditions, as well as playing a central role in psychological adjustment. Individuals with limited language skills often struggle to adapt to their new environment and may face challenges in expressing themselves, which can lead to social difficulties and behavioral issues (Karaoğlu, 2007: 27).

Language proficiency is a fundamental component of adapting to an education system in a foreign country, with research showing that students lacking adequate proficiency in the language of instruction often face difficulties both academically and socially. The language environment affects student adaptation, especially for international learners (cited in Troyanskaya, 2022). Thus, supporting language learning and fostering an understanding of intercultural communication are essential for successful adaptation. The complex process of student adaptation to foreign educational institutions has been widely studied by scholars in education and intercultural communication (Garabayev, 2000; Gökyer, 2017; Paksoy et al., 2012; Troyanskaya, 2022), with substantial literature identifying key factors that aid students in navigating different cultural and linguistic contexts.

Studies by Wilson (2011), Biserova (2019), Hussain & Shen (2019), and Cemalcılar & Falbo (2008) have focused on the challenges faced by international students in adapting to various educational systems, highlighting the critical role of institutional support and adaptation programs in facilitating sociocultural and academic integration and identifying key factors that affect this process.

As demonstrated by the research of Gahwal (2021), Sanbayeva and Yessenova (2023), Dossanova and Abdikadyr (2011), and Umurkulova et al. (2021), the integration of international students and migrants in Kazakhstan presents a substantial challenge, with studies emphasizing a range of adjustment difficulties—such as language barriers, housing, financial constraints, communication issues, and educational adaptation—while also highlighting the critical need for tailored approaches and resources to support the social integration of diverse student populations.

In Türkiye, the primary education system has undergone substantial reforms aimed at supporting students' sociocultural and pedagogical adaptation, reflecting a broader academic interest in how

education systems adapt to evolving global and national demands (Aksit, 2007; Akınoğlu, 2008; Kırkgöz, 2007). Research in this area has focused on key issues such as curriculum reform, the incorporation of international education standards, and the role of education in shaping national identity. Akşit (2007) highlighted major curricular and structural changes, while Akınoğlu (2008) emphasized the integration of global and European Union standards. Studies by Kırkgöz (2007) and Kaplan (2006) examined language planning and the role of education on national culture, respectively, collectively underscoring the complex and multidimensional nature of students' transition from primary to higher education in Türkiye.

Existing research clearly shows that the process of adapting to educational institutions abroad is both complex and critical, underscoring the need for further studies and targeted support strategies to help students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds integrate successfully. Key aspects of socio-pedagogical adaptation identified in the literature include cultural integration (Ward et al., 2001), academic adaptation (Anderson, 1994), and social relationships (Berry, 1997). Cultural adaptation entails understanding and internalizing local customs and values, academic adaptation involves meeting educational standards and adjusting to new teaching practices, and building social networks is essential for fostering a sense of belonging and reducing feelings of isolation in unfamiliar environments.

Türkiye has become a popular destination for students from various countries, including Kazakhstan, pursuing higher education. Its attractive academic programs, diverse institutions, and rich cultural environment have made it an appealing choice for international students. Additionally, Turkish Language Education Application and Research Centers (TÖMERs) play an important role in supporting student mobility from Kazakhstan to Türkiye by offering comprehensive Turkish language courses and cultural enrichment activities.

TÖMERs are Turkish language learning centers established specifically to support foreign students pursuing higher education in Türkiye. Most universities with international student populations host their own TÖMER, providing language instruction aimed at accelerating students' integration into Türkiye's academic and social environments. These centers also promote understanding of Turkish culture, traditions, and customs through organized cultural activities. Offering comprehensive Turkish language courses across all proficiency levels, from beginner to advanced, TÖMERs have served over 100,000 students from 160 countries across Türkiye as of 2022 (TÖMER, 2024).

The process of adapting to educational institutions abroad is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that holds considerable importance in the fields of education and intercultural communication. The language environment has been identified as a key determinant of successful adaptation (Karaoğlu, 2007; Troyanskaya, 2022), with institutional support essential for language acquisition and the development of intercultural communication skills. Recent research further emphasizes that adaptation extends beyond linguistic challenges, encompassing the formation of social networks, management of psychological stress, and access to institutional resources tailored to international students' needs (Biserova & Shagivaleeva, 2019; Hussain & Shen, 2019; Umurkulova et al., 2021).

Earlier studies, such as Bekmakhanova (1983) laid the foundation by conceptualizing adaptation as an interaction between the individual and the social environment; however, these perspectives may not fully reflect the complexities of contemporary international education. More recent research (e.g., Sanbayeva & Yessenova, 2023; Oleksiuk, 2022) highlights the evolving nature of adaptation in modern higher education, particularly the interconnection between language acquisition, socio-cultural integration, and institutional support. By grounding the current study in this updated scholarship, we seek to bridge historical frameworks with contemporary evidence to offer a comprehensive analysis of Kazakh students' adaptation in Türkiye.

The primary aim of this research is to identify the key factors affecting the socio-pedagogical adaptation of Kazakh students in Turkish educational institutions and to analyze how these factors influence their academic performance and socio-cultural integration. To this end, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

(1) What socio-pedagogical and socio-cultural factors influence the successful adaptation of Kazakh students to Turkish universities?

(2) How do Kazakh students cope with the challenges they encounter during the adaptation process, and how do Turkish universities provide assistance and resources to support this process?

(3) How can preparatory and adaptation programmes be modified or enhanced to ensure more effective integration of students from Kazakhstan into the Turkish higher education environment?

 This study focuses on the adaptation of Kazakh students studying at universities in Türkiye. Gazi University, as one of the country's leading academic institutions, along with Gazi TÖMER, provides international students with the necessary support and guidance to ensure a smooth

transition into the Turkish education system. The findings of this research are significant as they inform the development of practical strategies to support the successful integration of international students and promote an inclusive learning environment for all.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a case study design, a qualitative research approach selected for its capacity to facilitate an in-depth exploration of the socio-pedagogical adaptation of Kazakh students in Turkish higher education. The case study method allows for a detailed investigation of a specific phenomenon within its real-life context, using systematic data collection and longitudinal analysis (Subaşı & Okumuş, 2017).

Participants

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure alignment with the research objectives. The study focused exclusively on students from Kazakhstan enrolled at Gazi University, applying the following inclusion criteria:

(1)   Participants were selected based on nationality, with the study limited to students from Kazakhstan.

(2)   Participants represented various levels of education, including preparatory class, undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students.

(3)   A prerequisite for participation was current residence in Türkiye during the time of the study.

(4)   Voluntary participation was essential, and all participants took part willingly. The study was conducted with the voluntary participation of students.

A total of 26 participants were selected through purposive sampling. The sample included 13 students enrolled in TÖMER language courses at Gazi University during the 2023–2024 academic year, as well as 13 students from third- and fourth-year undergraduate, graduate, and Ph.D. programs. Table 1 presents the distribution of participants according to their educational status.

Table 1

Distribution of the sample according to education level

Educational Level	Number	Gender		Respondents
		Woman	**Male**	
TÖMERdil preparatory class students				
PhD candidate student	1	1		T 13
Master candidate student	1	1		T 12
Undergraduate candidate student	11	5	6	T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8, T9, T10, T11.
TÖMER preparatoryclass students total	13	7	6	T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, T8, T9, T10, T11,T12, T13.
Undergraduate and graduate students.				
PhD student	4	4		A2, A2, A12, A13
Master	1		1	A9
Undergraduate	8	3	5	A1, A4, A5, A6, A7, A8, A10, A11.
Total undergraduate and graduate students	13	7	6	A1,A2,A3,A4,A5, A6, A7, A8, A96 A10, A11,A12,A13.
Total	26	14	12	

Table 1 presents the educational background of the students participating in the study. It includes 13 students (seven female and six male) from the TÖMER language preparatory class

and a total of 26 Kazakh students, comprising 11 undergraduates, one master's, and one doctoral student.

Data Collection

The data were collected through interviews with 26 Kazakhstani students, including third–fourth year undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students enrolled in TÖMER preparatory classes and various faculties and institutes at Gazi University between February and March 2024. Each interview lasted approximately 30–40 minutes, and the entire data collection process spanned six weeks. A pilot study was conducted with two students prior to the interviews to refine the semi-structured format and ensure the clarity and relevance of the questions.

Instrument

Reliability was ensured by adhering to standardized interview protocols and obtaining informed consent from all participants for audio recording. The semi-structured interview protocol comprised 11 open- ended questions addressing language education, socio-cultural integration, and academic challenges.

Data Analysis

Following data collection, all interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. Researchers first familiarized themselves with the data through repeated readings, then generated initial codes both manually and with NVivo software.   The coding process was collaboratively reviewed and refined through iterative discussions until full consensus was achieved, resulting in a Cohen's Kappa coefficient of 0.82, indicating strong agreement. Discrepancies were resolved by consensus. Themes were then reviewed, defined, and illustrated with representative quotations in the Findings section. Additionally, descriptive analysis highlighted key challenges related to student adjustment, with findings interpreted in terms of their educational and socio-cultural implications.

Findings

This section presents the research findings based on the categories and codes derived from the data analysis, aligned with the study's aims and research questions. The views of language preparatory class students and those of undergraduate and graduate students were analyzed separately and then comparatively evaluated. Participant responses from the interviews were directly quoted, and their insights were integrated into the analysis.

The descriptive analysis of interviews with preparatory class students at TÖMER revealed that Kazakh students' views on their adaptation to the university environment abroad clustered around three main themes, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Distribution of Opinions Related to Adaptation of TÖMER Preparatory Course Students

TEMA	CATEGORY	CODES
Reason for choosing to study abroad	Rationale	• Grant • Purpose of studying • Desire to study abroad • Teacher suggestions
Adaptation Problems	Language barrier	• Communication challenges • Cultural challenges • Physical analogies
Recommendations for Adaptation to the New Environment	Harmony	• Clubs • Courses • Orientation events • Improving language training • Active communication with Turks

In addition to highlighting key issues, attention was also given to participants' remarks during the interviews. The table presents the themes and codes developed based on students' responses. The

first theme concerns the reasons for choosing to study abroad, which include scholarships, grants, teacher recommendations, and, most commonly, the aspiration to pursue higher education.

Student (S10) stated: "It seems to me that studying in Türkiye is a great way to gain international experience in studying abroad. Through this experience I will be able to broaden my knowledge and expectations in the field of education and prepare for a possible career in Europe, which gives me confidence that I am making the right choice as I strive to achieve my educational and professional goals." This comment underscores the importance of studying in Türkiye as a valuable international experience. It emphasizes that Türkiye not only offers quality education but also provides students with the opportunity to expand their perspectives and prepare for future careers in Europe, making it an appealing destination for those seeking globally oriented academic pathways.

The second theme pertains to the integration problems faced by students in Türkiye. Key challenges identified include communication difficulties resulting from language barriers, feelings of physical and emotional isolation, the need to adjust to unfamiliar cultural norms, and difficulties adapting to new living conditions. These factors collectively emerged as important obstacles to successful adaptation for Kazakh students in the Turkish higher education environment.

Student (T11) stated, "There were difficulties in adapting during the education process; many teachers only spoke Turkish. Would it have been better if they had interpreted in English? It was hard to understand." This highlights how language barriers pose a major challenge to adaptation, particularly when instruction is delivered solely in Turkish. The lack of English interpretation can hinder international students' ability to grasp course content, whereas providing interpretation could significantly improve their understanding and make the learning experience more accessible and effective.

In addition to emphasizing key issues, it is important to consider participants' individual reflections during the interviews, as they offer insight into personal experiences of the integration process. For instance, one participant expressed disappointment over being compared to Chinese individuals, highlighting how certain aspects of intercultural interaction can lead to negative perceptions and contribute to difficulties in adjustment.

The third main theme focuses on the strategies students use to adapt to their new environment. Participants identified university-organized activities—such as student clubs, extracurricular courses, and cultural events—as helpful tools for easing the adaptation process. In the interviews,

students also emphasized the importance of improving language education and encouraging more active communication with Turkish peers to support successful integration. Additionally, assessing students' overall satisfaction with their stay abroad emerged as a key point, reflecting their general impressions of the university environment and the effectiveness of integration efforts.

Another student noted that adapting to the local cuisine was challenging, particularly due to the greasiness of the food. Student (S3) remarked, "The food was very greasy, which made me sick at first." Despite such difficulties, several participants highlighted positive experiences, especially regarding the supportive and friendly behavior of Turkish people and educators. Student (S13) stated, "TÖMER's teachers are good at helping students to adapt and even help them find accommodation," while Student (S12) commented, "The teachers at TÖMER in Türkiye are kind," reflecting the crucial role of faculty support in facilitating student adaptation.

Table 3 presents the themes and codes that emerged from the interviews conducted with undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students.

Table 3

Distribution of Opinions Related to the Compliance of Undergraduate, Master's and Doctoral Students

TEMA	CATEGORY	CODES
Difficulties with the address of residence	Challenges	• Obtaining residency • University support services

Students' relations with teachers	Appreciation	• The friendship of teachers, • Willingness to help and support students, • Creating a supportive educational environment, ensuring student participation, • Valuing students' relationships with teachers
Problems with the language learning environment	Language learning problems.	• Students' difficulties due to the lack of command of English by some teachers. • Therefore, difficulties in understanding teaching materials and communicating in the classroom

The table presents themes and codes derived from students' interview responses, with the first theme focusing on challenges related to residential addresses. These challenges include difficulties in obtaining residency, limited information or guidance from the university about address procedures, and insufficient institutional support services to assist students in managing these requirements.

The first notable problem observed is the difficulty related to home addresses, as highlighted by several participants. Student A2 stated: "There is a problem with the home address." Concerns were raised about the lack of clear information or support from the university on this matter. Participants noted delays in communication between the Immigration Department and the University's Student Affairs Office. Such issues can negatively affect students' adaptation by

creating uncertainty and administrative stress, potentially hindering their ability to settle in and begin their academic studies on time.

The second theme concerns students' relationships with teachers. Students' responses were coded as teacher friendliness, willingness to help and support, creation of a supportive learning environment, active encouragement of participation, and valuing of relationships between students and teachers. Students reported feeling valued and viewed teachers' friendliness and readiness to help positively. This approach was seen as essential to a supportive environment. As A4 noted, "Teachers try to help me because they think I am an international student, and I like that."

Furthermore, students view open communication with teachers positively, as it facilitates easier comprehension of course material and effective information exchange. For example, participant A5 noted, "Teachers behave quite freely and maintain good relationships with their students,'' highlighting how such openness supports learning.

The third theme concerned challenges in the language learning environment. Students reported difficulties arising from some lecturers limited English proficiency. Participant A9 stated, "Teachers' lack of English proficiency creates difficulties during lessons.'' Such limitations can impede comprehension of course materials, particularly for students who do not speak Turkish, and can hinder both the reception of instruction and classroom communication. These barriers may diminish instructional quality, reduce understanding of content, and constrain the development of targeted skills.

These views illuminate students' individual experiences and adaptation challenges. Undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral students reported achieving strong adaptation over three to four years of study and indicated few current difficulties. Most described their adaptation as very good, suggesting that studying abroad has been a positive experience.

Table 4 presents preparatory, undergraduate, master's, and doctoral students' views on comparative adjustment.

Table 4

Comparative adaptation views of preparatory class students and undergraduate, master and doctoral students

Theme	TÖMER students	Bachelor's degree, master's degree doctoral and master's students
Barriers to Adaptation	Language difficulties, cultural differences, accommodation problems	Lack of information about housing, problems with the address of residence
Integration into thenew environment	Interacting with local students, getting used to the local culture	Finding new social contacts, adapting to the learning environment
Students' relations with teachers	Friendship with teachers, level of support	Interaction with teachers, academic relationships

A comparative analysis of TÖMER students and undergraduate, master's, and doctoral students identified both shared and distinct patterns in educational experience and adaptation. Both groups encountered language barriers and housing challenges during adjustment. TÖMER students paid greater attention to cultural differences and interaction with local peers as avenues for integration, whereas degree students emphasized the need for additional language support, concerns about residential address procedures, and relationships with instructors. Despite these obstacles, both groups expressed satisfaction with their learning and underscored the central role of teacher support in successful adaptation.

Discussion and conclusion

Findings from interviews with preparatory, undergraduate, master's, and doctoral students indicate that the primary adaptation challenges are language barriers, housing, and cultural differences,

including nutrition and traditions. These findings directly address Research Question 1 (RQ1) by identifying the key socio-pedagogical factors influencing adaptation. Consistent with Karaoğlu (2007), language barriers emerge as a leading impediment to successful adaptation, particularly for international students.

The study shows that admitting Kazakh students to Türkiye is a complex process that presents both challenges and opportunities. Although participants reported some difficulties, most expressed satisfaction with their university adaptation and learning experiences. This corresponds to RQ2, which concerns the difficulties and coping strategies of Kazakh students. These findings underscore the need for institutional support and demonstrate a growing commitment to building supportive and inclusive learning environments through intercultural engagement. This aligns with Cemalçılar (2008), who found that a supportive institutional climate significantly facilitates the integration of international students in the host country. This provides evidence for RQ3 regarding the role of universities in supporting adaptation through language education and institutional resources.

Research shows that language-related challenges strongly shape adaptation. Karaoğlu (2007) shows that the linguistic environment is important for successful adjustment, fostering language acquisition and intercultural understanding, a conclusion echoed by our findings. Likewise, Biserova (2019) reports that a solid linguistic foundation enhances academic performance and eases sociocultural integration, mirroring the experiences of Kazakh students in this study. Likewise, Bokayev (2024) notes that language barriers and acculturation stress remain central obstacles to international students' integration in U.S. campuses, underscoring the universal importance of linguistic competence for successful adaptation. Okunishi and Tanaka (2023) also found that cross-cultural communication difficulties, such as differences in assertiveness and sociability, significantly influence Japanese students' adaptation in France—findings that parallel the interpersonal and intercultural challenges observed among Kazakh students in Türkiye. In relation to RQ4, these findings highlight the importance of socio-cultural factors in integration. The adaptation of Kazakh students in Türkiye also depends on expectations, motivation, teaching methods, and teacher support. Radeva and Georgieva (2017) similarly emphasize that aligning student motivation with supportive pedagogy is essential for positive outcomes. Accordingly, Tajibayeva et al. (2025) showed that psychological adaptation and pedagogical competence

are significant predictors of university adjustment among repatriate students, indicating that educational support mechanisms are essential in overall adaptation processes.

Institutional support, targeted interventions, and preparatory activities substantially facilitate international students' adjustment. Tailored approaches and resources for culturally diverse students in Türkiye are essential for successful integration. Hussain and Shen (2019) emphasize orientation programs that address students' specific challenges, aligning with this study's call for targeted institutional measures. This directly relates to RQ5, on the enhancement of preparatory and adaptation programmes. Wilson (2011), Biserova (2019), Hussain and Shen (2019), and Cemalçılar (2008) likewise identify key determinants of adaptation across educational settings. Research by Radeva and Georgieva (2017), Hsiao-li (2007), Mukumova (2021), and Oleksiuk (2022) further highlights the roles of expectations, motivation, pedagogy, faculty engagement, and developing professional interest. This study corroborates these findings for Kazakhstani students in Turkish universities, underscoring the centrality of faculty support and culturally responsive teaching methods.

Research by Radeva and Georgieva (2017), Hsiao-li (2007), Mukumova (2021), and Oleksiuk (2022) highlights the importance of student adaptability, expectations, motivation, pedagogical methods, and faculty roles, as well as the development of professional interest. Overall, the findings concern students' adaptation to the Turkish environment.

Several key measures can enhance the successful adaptation of international students. Foremost is expanded language support, including intensive courses, language clubs, and structured communication practice, which helps students overcome language barriers, especially at the beginning of their studies.

Orientation programs play a crucial role in supporting the successful transition of international students. Universities should implement adaptation days, cultural workshops, and excursions to introduce students to both the educational system and daily life in the host country. Beyond these initial initiatives, sustained guidance throughout the first semester can help students build confidence, develop essential skills, and foster a sense of belonging. Promoting intercultural communication is equally important, as it contributes to a tolerant and inclusive campus climate. Initiatives such as cultural festivals and student clubs that facilitate the exchange of traditions provide opportunities for meaningful interaction and mutual understanding. In addition, support

with housing and living conditions is essential, as accommodation challenges often create stress during the adjustment process. Universities can play a key role in assisting students with securing appropriate housing, adapting to new living arrangements, and managing everyday life effectively. Finally, teachers and administrators should provide personalized consultations, mentorship, and ongoing support to cultivate a positive and inclusive learning environment that promotes adaptation, academic success, and overall well-being.

Findings show that university support, active engagement in intercultural and educational activities, and students' willingness to adapt to cultural norms and embrace new traditions are central to successful adjustment. International students' difficulties arise from multiple sources, including the linguistic environment, the role of educators, institutional resources, and broader educational reforms. The results underscore educators' pivotal role in offering support and empathy that enable effective adaptation to new academic settings. The study also incorporates students' perspectives on the obstacles they face during adaptation and their assessments of the support provided by their institutions. his final point responds to RQ6 by emphasizing why certain strategies are more effective in supporting student adaptation.

Considering the findings, the sociopedagogical adaptation of Kazakh students in Turkish universities is shaped by interrelated factors, notably language proficiency, institutional support, and sociocultural engagement. Although students face housing and cultural challenges, adaptation improves with comprehensive preparatory programs, tailored orientation, and active educator involvement. These results underscore the need for an integrated strategy that combines academic, social, and cultural supports to secure successful adaptation.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings, several measures can support international students' successful adaptation. Foremost is expanded language support at the outset, including intensive courses, language clubs, and structured communication practice.

Second, universities should provide orientation programs, including adaptation days, cultural workshops, and excursions, to help students acclimate to the new educational environment and way of life.

The third recommendation is to promote intercultural communication by organizing cultural festivals, establishing international student clubs, and hosting events that enable students to share experiences and traditions, thereby fostering a welcoming campus climate. It is also important to support students with practical matters, including finding housing, adjusting to new living conditions, and managing daily tasks.

Finally, active support from faculty and administrators is important; individual counseling, mentoring, and a welcoming campus climate facilitate student adaptation. This study is limited by its small sample (n=26)   and its conduct at Gazi University alone, which constrains the generalizability of the results to other institutions.

Note

This study derives from the first author's doctoral dissertation, supervised by the second and third authors.

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