



## A Study on Educational Tourism: Impacts of Foreign Students on The Perception of Local Turkish Students: Evidence From Northern Cyprus

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### Abstract

This study investigates the impacts of educational tourism. In this point, the paper aims to examine the effects of foreign students that are from Middle-East countries and study at Girne American University (GAU) in North Cyprus on the perception of the domestic students with respect to islamic countries and communities. In the literature reviewing, there has been many studies regarding educational tourism and its effects. On the other hand, it was observed that this impact of foreign students has never been studied by scholars in the previous investigations, however there are many students who are from islamic countries and have close relationships between these foreign students and local students. Specifically, this article explores the changes in perception of local students after recognizing islamic students. This paper concentrates on the qualitative case study method that evaluated the perceptions of undergraduate local students and accordingly, the sample of the study is ten students studying at different faculties of GAU. The data were coded and classified for generated issues, this study used data analysis constant comparative method, known as Grounded Theory Method. Owing to little sample size, evidences were analyzed as indicative. Findings showed that there are important effects of Islamic students on Turkish students in terms of changes of their perceptions regarding Islamic countries. The effects of Islamic students on Turkish students were centralized on nine major titles; (a) perceptions about foreign languages in Islamic communities, (b) perceptions about positive sciences developments in Islamic communities, (c) perceptions about the role of women in social life in Islamic communities, (d) perceptions about social relations in Islamic communities, (e) perceptions about dressing styles of people in Islamic communities, (f) perceptions about individual freedom and human rights in Islamic communities, (g) perceptions about the effects of religion in social life of Islamic communities, (h) perception changes about Islamic culture, (i) contributions of Islamic students on the learning experience of Turkish students. This study was carried out with ten students studying at GAU in North Cyprus. To generalize the findings, the other universities might be included and the sample size can be increased in the future research process. The other limitations are specified in the last part of the study.

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## **Introduction**

Cyprus is a small island in the Mediterranean Sea which possesses the main characteristics of small island states. The services sector was given priority basically as a result of political isolation and embargoes faced by North Cyprus in every field. The 1980s became a transition period from manufacturing industry to services with a focus on tourism and higher education. On the other hand, the demand for higher education sector in North Cyprus showed a considerable increase by 1990s (See SPO, 2007) mainly because of Turkish students from Turkey.

Overseas students have been coming to North Cyprus for higher education since 1982. Afterwards there has been a steady increase in the number of overseas students from more than 68 countries all around the world as more universities were established in the country. Having internationally recognized universities with accredited diplomas in North Cyprus contributes to the image of North Cyprus in international arena also through international conferences, seminars, social, cultural and sports activities. The higher education sector has now been the most important sector in North Cyprus earning considerable foreign exchange and contributing to this small and non-recognized island state (Katircioğlu, 2010).

The sustaining wave of foreign students from many nations, together with the a lot opportunities of North Cyprus, has boosted religious, ethnic, and racial minority groups living (Seggie and Sanford, 2010) in this small island state.

Education tourism is defined as any "program in which participants travel to a location as a group with the primary purpose of engaging in a learning experience" (Rodger, 1998). Education tourism has only been recently acknowledged as an independent sector worth studying. However, education tourism has existed for several hundred years. Compared to many other nations, Northern Cyprus enjoys a much higher education tourism to tourism ratio. Developing the edu-tourism sector will not only divert the structure of economy from being a small-scale business oriented to more human-capital oriented (Aga, 2011). Incoming foreign students are not only important for the Northern Cyprus economy because they are not consumers of products and services. Otherwise, there is a social impacts of the educational tourism in the North Cyprus. In this sense, this study concentrate to social impacts which means that the effects of islamic students on the perception of local students regarding the Middle-East nations.

## **The Purpose of The Study**

It is aimed, in this paper, to find out the perceptions of local students associated with islamic nations after recognizing the foreign students which are from Middle-East countries and study at university in Northern Cyprus.

## **Contribution of The Study**

Researchers have carried out many studies on the islamic countries and the relationships between locals and their self beliefs, even some of the previous studies have concentrated

on the congruence between these students and regional factors. However, the inquiry on the effects of islamic students on the local students in terms of the perception about islamic countries has hardly ever been done. Particularly, the study presents an insight regarding the changes in perception of local students after recognizing islamic students.

There is a lacking about the study of the effects of islamic students on local students, despite the fact that there has been a big amount of studies about it in the educational literature. This study immensely contributes to literature with respect to concord between international and local students and the effect of foreign students on local students.

## **Literature Review**

Many studies have showed that foreign students lent to the social environment and the economy of the country where they resume the education (Pandit, 2007; Marino, 2007; Labi et al., 2008). The most of the researchers have concentrated on the economic impacts of international students. Also, the studies established on the social and cultural integration, financial problems, academic concords and the psychological and legal issues of the international students. Many scholars have widely studied on the topics relevant to the interactions between local communities and foreign students (Saidla & Parodi, 1991; Winkelman, 1994; Rajapaksa & Dundes, 2003; Wilton & Constantine, 2003; Obst & Forster, 2005; Constantine et al., 2005; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006; Ye, 2006; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007; Dorozhkin & Mazitova, 2008; Brown & Holloway, 2008; Townsend & Huay, 2008; Zhou et al., 2008; Gonzalez-Castro et al., 2009; Keller, 2009; Charles & Crowson, 2010). However, there has established few study on the social and cultural effects of international students might be on the domestic students.

Seggie and Sanford (2010) investigated that the perceptions of the students who are foreign islamic women students relevant to spiritual atmosphere of campus. They studied to reveal the facilities and issues of islamic veiled women students throughout their university terms. This study indicated that the veiled women students have a shy at sense of slight sack and excluding. However, they perceive the spiritual atmosphere of campus inviting to apparent extent. Also, this study showed that different students in terms of religious split similar experience though they differ in respect to ethnical and cultural aspects.

Jourдини (2012) examined that the effects of international students on American students. The findings of the study indicated that there are positive effects and contributions of international students on American students in terms of education and culture. Katircioğlu (2010) investigated the economic effects of international students on the growth of North Cyprus. There is a longterm association between educational tourism and economic development. Also, this study claimed that educational tourism in terms of higher education lead to growth of the economy of North Cyprus.

Luo and Jamieson (2013) examined the impacts of intenational students on domestic students in terms of

academic outcomes. The results of this study indicated that the positive communications between international and domestic students such as meeting in out of the campus, collaborations for the course projects increase the interplay between cultures.

Cheney (2001) mentioned that there are two positive impacts of international students on domestic students with their interactions between them. First, domestic students realize the significance of language using, secondly, the improvement of international engagements contributes to awareness of domestic students regard to social, cultural, political, and economic aspects of foreign communities. Furthermore, the increment of cultural withitness lead to study with student who come from distinct cultures, local students can have a good experiences in terms of recognize different cultures that it increased their chances in the market during globalization of the world and increasing of interconnection through technological developments. (Calleja, 2000; Montgomery, 2009).

Robert Park(1924) firstly described the Social Distance Concept(SDC) as the rate of comprehension and nearness that define individual and social associations. The SDC was developed by Bogardus to describe the relationships between two persons, between a person and group, between two groups.

Bogardus emphasized that the rate of sympathetic comprehension between individuals and groups will conclude in either fondness or social aloofness. Bogardus conducted two important factors which clarify distance between two community. First, cultural diversities obstruct community from comprehensive the others. Second, he indicates deficiency of dating and information as reason social remoteness. He stressed that anyone can not expect to know something from the stranger individual since, the maintenance of useful rate of individual closeness involves permanent care to the pivotal factors of personality such as honesty, openmindedness, sincere concern in the other.

Prejudice is “further or fewer unconditioned and natural inclination to sustain social remoteness” from the others (Wark & Galliher, 2007). Early studies emphasized projeduce augment the social remoteness among the communities. According to news schedules on middle east countries, many communities hut unfavorable thoughts about muslims and arabs due to terrorism attacks. Also, many countries have bias toward these middle-east nations because, arab communities are governed by the Shariah.

The social identity theory(SIT) stresses that the quite handling of “us” and “they” classification could reveal bias between groups and cronyism, causing to battle and prejudice (Castro et al., 2009). The prejudice opposite different nations may be reveal in the distinct shapes and different group members meet at school and the other places.

The findings of the research of Castro et.al. (2009) indicate that the major determinants that the foreign people or immigrations have extremely impacts on cultural development, on the reationships between different races.

In this point, Bogardus is right, he indicated social remoteness and therefore disagreement soars if cultural

diversities are stressed and when exact opinion of anoher is lacking.

The scholars suggest that the internationalization of education and the steady exposure to foreign collegians are efficient methods to establish substantial multicultural associations.

Social presence theory(SPT)emphasizes that powerful transmission happens entities involved are physically present. SPT is described as “ rate of conspicuousness of another individual in the interplay and consequent conspicuousnessof interpersonal associations.(Kreijns et al., 2004). This paper investigates the interplays between islamic students and domestic Turkish students and how the interaction affects the perceptions of domestic students about educational and social life in the arap communities.

## **Methods and Procedures**

This investigation was conducted using the case study. They improved specific senses of their shies – senses oriented to apparent stuffs or matters. These senses are altered and multiplied (Creswell, 2003). Therefore, the researcher deal with the perceptions of the Turkish students regarding arab communities.

The findings of this study were acquired in consequence of the interviews with ten Turkish students who study at different departments of GAU in North Cyprus. It can be claimed that these discoveries offer a unique aspect to context of educational tourism literature as different from previous studies. The avail of this study is small sample that resercher has the chance to examine the private subjects thanks to more exhaustive data. On the other hand, the results of this paper cannot be generalized due to fact that there isn't large sample as quantitative researches (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

## **Sample**

The GAU that is one of the largest universities in North Cyprus was selected in this article for interview with university students. Because, this university has many students who come from several countries and cultures such as Iran, Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. The researcher only communicatedwith the students via mobile phone and email in order to be able to organize the interviews of this study. Ten students were selected with theoretical and snowball sampling methods that they study at different faculties or departments at GAU. The interviews with the respondents were arranged between December 25th and January 8th, 2013. In the interview days, researcher communicated with the participants and they arranged the meeting point and the interview time. Generally, interviews were conducted in the university site which was proposed by the participants. At the start of each interview, the students were given assurance by the researcher about the knowledge obtained from participants will only be used in this study and will exactly be kept secret.

## **Data Collection**

The data of this study were obtained through face to face interviews from ten students who study at different

departments of GAU. Eighteen questions were asked to students by the researcher. The interview form was divided into 2 parts. First part included 9 demographic questions in order to obtain information regarding personal traits of participants. In order to be able to gain and explore some findings with respect to perceptions of Turkish students about islamic countries and communities, there are nine open-ended questions in the second part. The interviews lasted approximately 60-75 minutes and inquired each respondents' perceptions regarding islamic communities after knowing the islamic students in the college.

The pilot study applied to one Turkish students who study at GAU was to examine the availability of the qualitative study. All the questions in the pilot were seen acceptable with the necessary interview time 70 minutes.

### Data Analysis

The interviews with participants were recorded with smart-phone and then transcribed. The data were coded and classified for generated issues, this study used data analysis constant comparative method, known as Grounded Theory Method. In this study, pseudonyms were used for the naming of the respondents. The confidentiality of the respondents was assured to freely express themselves. Afterwards, discussion conveyed the participants' perceptions regarding islamic countries.

### Findings

#### The Participants' Profile

In this study, it was interviewed with ten Turkish undergraduate students. Table 1 indicates results regarding participants' profile. Six respondents were female, four respondents were male. Six respondents were between ages of 19-21. Four participants were between ages of 26-28. All of the students were from Turkey. The participants studied in different faculties and departments of GAU such as Computer Engineering, Communication Faculty, Faculty of Architecture, Faculty of Education. Of these ten respondents, three were in their first year, two were in their second year, one was in her third year, three were in their fourth year, and one was in his sixth year. All of the respondents spent their times with thier foreign students in college. Lastly, half of the participants always spent their time with islamic students out of campus. On the other hand, half of them sometimes spent time with their islamic students out of college.

#### Emergent Themes

The nine fundamental titles were obtained from the participants after the interview process regarding the effects of islamic students on the perceptions of participants in terms of islamic countries and islamic communities. The effects of islamic students on Turkish students were centralized on nine major titles; (a) perceptions about foreign languages in Islamic communities, (b) perceptions about positive sciences developments in Islamic communities, (c) perceptions about the role of women in social life in Islamic communities, (d) perceptions about social relations in

Islamic communities, (e) perceptions about dressing styles of people in Islamic communities, (f) perceptions about individual freedoms and human rights in Islamic communities, (g) perceptions about the effects of religion in social life of Islamic communities, (h) perception changes about Islamic culture, (i) contributions of Islamic students on the learning experience of Turkish students.

**Table 1. Respondent Profiles**

Respondents	Age	Sex	Department	Years	Spentoutof Campus
Ahmet	28	Male	Comp. Engineering	6	Sometimes
Ayşe	20	Female	Communication	2	Yes
Tuğba	21	Female	Architecture	1	Yes
Gizem	19	Female	Psychology	1	Yes
İlker	26	Male	Computer Teaching	4	Sometimes
Merve	21	Female	Schoolteaching	3	Yes
Nuri	26	Male	Education	4	Sometimes
Ramazan	26	Male	Architecture	4	Sometimes
Selim	21	Male	Education	2	Yes
Zeynep	20	Female	Psychology	1	Sometimes

#### Perceptions About Foreign Languages In Islamic Communities:

In this part, the important informations were obtained regarding whether the perceptions of Turkish students changed or not about Islamic communities in terms of foreign language skills after meet with their Islamic friends.

While the perceptions about foreign language skills of arabic communities were discussed with the participants, it was firstly revealed that all of the Turkish participants didn't think that foreign languages such as English are not taught in these countries and the people of Islamic communities cannot be foreign languages. The participants mentioned that they knew to teach only arabic language in these countries before coming to college, they were thought that Islamic people couldn't learn one of the foreign languages such as English. Ayşe and Tuba mentioned that if somebody previously said me that arabic people can speak English, I didn't believe him. Other students mentioned similar statements and they highlighted that Islamic students can speak English better than Turkish students, because of this their thoughts completely changed about foreign language skills of Islamic countries. The all of the interview students were influenced by Islamic students in terms of their English skills. Ayşe noted:

The foreign language skills of Islamic students are very well in terms of especially speaking. They clearly and understandably speak English. I didn't believe

previously, if someone said me that arabs speak English very well. I didn't know that their English was so much well. We learn English at the very latest years and because of this, we cannot speak well. If I say to someone in Turkey that arabs speak English much well, s/he laughs at me. Arabic students haven't got difficulty living abroad because, they can speak foreign languages. For example, I have a friend from Tebriz district of Iran, she can ably speak three foreign languages; Turkish, English, and Arabic. There are other Islamic friends who can speak two or three foreign languages. This case provides to change of my opinion about these countries such as Iran, Iraq, and Syria. I admired to these people in that respect. And also, it seems that the language education is not bad in these countries as we thought.

Ramazan agreed and added that;

They speak English much better, if we compare with us. I have friends who can speak different languages such as French, English, and Spanish. I didn't know previously. For example, Iraqi students even speak English better than us.

Ahmet and Selin indicated that they think these Islamic students receive top-level English education in their countries. Merve mentioned that Islamic students are keen on learning English, because they tend to go abroad. It motivates these students.

All in all, according to these participants, they thought that foreign language education is in low-level in Islamic countries, accordingly Islamic students cannot speak foreign language such as English, and French. But, this perception of Turkish students changed, when they met with Islamic students at university in North Cyprus. Therefore, Islamic students have a important mission in terms of removing of prejudice of Turkish students regard to foreign language skills of Islamic countries.

### **Perceptions About Developments of Positive Sciences In Islamic Communities:**

Almost all participants thought before coming to college that religious education comes up in madrasahs instead of positive sciences in Islamic countries. The participant students indicated that they thought previously that Islamic countries or middle-east countries refer to the Shari'a, religious education, and repressive regime. The positive sciences are not preceeded, if it is compared with religious education, because religious laws are dominant in these countries, they said. On the other hand, these countries are recognized with oil reservoirs instead of sciences throughout the world. All participants mentioned that they knew previously that positive sciences are drawn back in Islamic countries. Ayşe indicated that she previously thought that these countries are like last epoch of Ottoman which means that Ottoman removed scientific studies and religious law was fulfilled instead of positive sciences at late times of Ottoman Empire beginning from the 17th century. Ilker said that he didn't exactly know the development of education in these countries but, he thinks that Islamic students are successful at the courses thanks to basic training of their countries even if there is Shari'a. For example, he has a

friend from Iran and this student studies at Computer Engineering Department and also there are many students who study at different faculties such as architecture, science physics, and chemistry. If these countries don't give importance to positive sciences, these students cannot study at these departments.

Additionally, the participants indicated that Islamic students who study in North Cyprus have an influence on the change of perceptions of Turkish students about development of positive sciences and scientific studies in these countries.

There are 25 students in our class and 5 of these students are from Islamic countries such as Iran, Iraq, and Syria. I didn't previously know that these countries are interested with the scientific education. I thought that religion should be more important than positive sciences. There are 3-4 Iranian professor at our faculty. I learnt that there are some studies of Iran about nuclear power. For example, Iran can separately challenge to USA. Iran cannot do it only with the Shari'a and religious laws, it is not possible. It means that scientific studies also develop in this country. [Ahmet]

Nuri indicated that:

There are also Iranian professors at our university. When I was in K.Maraş, I thought that education referred to madrasah in Islamic countries. According to statements of our teachers in Turkey, he didn't know that there were so well-educated students. He knew that they usually study regarding religion. Actually, he still thinks that it should be so but these Islamic students who study in North Cyprus changed my opinion. Now, he also thinks that scientific training is not low as he knew.

Zeynep agreed and added that:

There is a contradiction, because, she usually thinks about Islamic countries that the Shari'a is dominant. The universities of North Cyprus may be not high quality. But, it shows that they are interested in science and recent developments, since Islamic students prefer the departments of universities of North Cyprus such as architecture, computer engineering and they come to study from their countries.

The respondents highlighted that they used to think before coming to North Cyprus, the religious law is dominant instead of scientific studies in Islamic countries. But, this perceptions and opinions of Turkish students were influenced by Islamic students when they met with them at the college. Because, almost all of them indicated that, if scientific studies aren't given importance in these countries, the parents of these students don't allow them to go abroad for education.

### **Perceptions About The Role Of Women In Social Life In Islamic Communities:**

In this part, significant impacts were gained from participants regard to the role of women in social life of Islamic communities. All participants indicated that they used to know the Islamic women as chador. But, Turkish students mentioned their astonishments in this case. Because, the Islamic women students are not be like thinking of Turkish students. Most of the Islamic female students dressed modernly, they said. Tuba indicated that previously,

she thought that all Islamic women were veiled and ladies were not free like men, they were restricted by men. But, after meeting with my Islamic friends, I understood that my opinions were not completely true. Because, there are many modern dressed women friends from Islamic countries. Other participants also mentioned that they thought previously that women were not independent in Islamic countries and all of them were veiled. Nuri indicated that he had prejudices about Islamic countries. One of them is inequality between women and men. It is a great bias for him. But, he explains that his experiences at this university conflict to his previous opinions. Because, boy and girl Islamic students are equal here, on the other hand, they may be different in their countries. However, recent developments have influenced all countries of the world, Islamic countries were also affected by these developments. Selin said that if this question was asked to her 2 years ago, she would say that Islamic countries were oppressive and male dominated communities. But, her opinions definitely changed when she met with Islamic students studying at college in North Cyprus. Now, according to Selin, Islamic countries are not oppressive as she thought.

As a result, the participants emphasize the change of their perceptions regarding women rights and the role of women in Islamic communities thanks to Islamic students who study in North Cyprus.

Ahmet indicated that:

It is false that they excessively draw back, since parents let their children go abroad for education. For example, I am from Mardin, parents don't admit their daughter as a child. If you ask to them how many children you have, they answer 3 children, actually they have 5 children, but they don't calculate their daughters. The girls get married at a child age and they give their girls to familiar people, because they don't want to share their properties with somebody else. They think to based on religious for me. On the other hand, parents from Islamic countries send their daughters to abroad for college education. It shows that the role of women is not so bad.

Ramazan added that:

I used to know that each men have a 3-4 wives in Islamic countries and women are valueless. But, the female students from Islamic countries showed that my opinions were not true. If my thoughts were right, they could not come to North Cyprus for education, they have to wait at home for marriage.

### **Perceptions About Social Relations In Islamic Communities:**

All students interviewed mentioned that almost all of the Islamic students are clubbable, sympathetic, and warm-hearted. The participants indicated that they thought previously that Islamic people were anti-social and thruster, but these views of Turkish students changed when they met with Islamic students in North Cyprus. Ayşe articulated that "they are polite when we go to the same cafe. They never hurt me up to now. They like travelling, discovering new

things and also some of them like nightlife". Tuba definitively indicated that:

They are not hard, in contrast, they are helpful. Before coming here, I used to think about them not being as social, according to me 2 years ago, they usually prayed and social relations especially between women and men were low. But, they are not so. There is a only one difference that is language, I think now.

Other participants said similar statements regarding social relations in Islamic countries. Gizem indicated that "I never thought of communicating with Islamic students, since they were rude for me. But, I realized here when I met one friend from Iran that they are not so rude, in contrast, they are so respectful". Also, Ramazan indicated that "we perceive the Islamic women as veiled and bogymen. But, they are not so, now we can joke with each other". On the other hand, Merve expressed that:

I have a friend who study at Faculty of Communication and he is a very sympathetic, and warm-hearted. He can influence the people who are around him. They aren't self-conscious. When I think now, I previously thought them so withdrawn. I think that, regime tries to prevent the developments of social relations especially between women and men, but, it is impossible during globalization process of the world. I noticed it here thanks to my foreign friends.

All in all, it showed during interviews that Turkish students have negative perceptions about social relations in Islamic countries especially in terms of women-men equality. But, the students who are from Islamic countries changed these unfavorable perceptions of Turkish students thanks to mutual interaction.

### **Perceptions About Dressing Styles Of People In Islamic Communities**

According to the obtained findings from participant students, the perceptions of all Turkish students changed regarding dressing styles of people who are from Islamic countries such as Iran, Iraq, and Syria. All participants indicated that they thought previously that Islamic women were veiled and men dressed gown. But the prejudices of Turkish students changed about dressing styles of Islamic people when they met with students who came from these countries. Ahmet and Tuba mentioned that "I suppose the veiled women but, I met here with skirted, made-up women. And also, I saw some long-haired and earringed men who are from these countries". Merve said that as distinct from our opinion, the Islamic girls stand out with their jewellery and accessories. They also make up like us". As Nuri articulated:

I used to think that the Islamic women as veiled, but there isn't any difference among them and us. They cannot likely dress in their countries, but Turkish girls also cannot dress in their districts as they dress here. This case definitely changes the model which is in our minds. The globalization influence these countries in terms of dressing styles of people, he said. According to him, it is a development.

Selin attended and supplemented that:

They dress like us on the contrary my previous predictions. They are not free in their countries as here. It valids for Turkish girls. For example, I have a girlfriend from Ş.Urfa. She firstly put on high-heeled shoes. she also dress differently. From this point, we resemble to Islamic girls. If they are veiled as my prediction, then they cannot wear low-cut and decollete. Image me, how much can I to wear the veil.I think that they are not close as reflected to us. These students overcame my prejudice regarding the dressing sytles of these communities.

### **Perceptions About Individual Freedoms And Human Rights In Islamic Communities:**

The responses of participants revealed that there are some dilemmas of Turkish students regarding individual freedoms and human rights in Islamic countries. One of the reasons of their dilemmas is Islamic girl students in North Cyprus. Most of the participants indicated that individual freedoms and human rights are limited in these countries, but Islamic girls can study at college degree abroad. It creates a contradiction for Turkish students. Ilker said that “I thought that women were not given freedom in these countries and they cannot go abroad for studying. But, my opinion changed when I saw Islamic girl students in our university”. Gizem also indicated “I used to know that men precede more than women in Islamic countries. But, I can say now that girls also have the same rights like men, after I met with the Islamic girls at the college.

Ahmet indicated that:

I thought, there was the Sheri'a in these countries, but if there was so much constraint, then families didn't allow their daughters for abroad education. For example, there is a tribe in Eastern Anatolia Region of Turkey. If the religion doesn't let parents give education of their children, then they cannot send their children for studying to Istanbul. Maybe, we perceive these countries as underdeveloped in terms of human rights.

Ramazan also added:

Human rights refer to European and Western for me. But, Islamic countries are also developing regarding this issue. Because, I have some friends from Islamic countries and they are so contemporary, the relationships between men and women are respectful. On the other hand, there are many Islamic student girls in these countries. It means that these countries appreciate the women, they tend to develop their human resources. I think that it is a government policy.

Other participants gave similar statements about individual freedom and human rights in Islamic countries. All in all, the responses showed that Turkish students have some bias toward Islamic countries about this topic. The Islamic students soften the prejudices of Turkish students, because, participants thought only Sheri'a and backward countries from the aspect of human rights before recognizing the Islamic students.

### **Perceptions About The Effects Of Religion In Social Life Of Islamic Communities:**

This is one of the parts which all participants concurred that they indicated “religion hasn't got effect in their lives as we tough”. Almost all participants use similar sentences while they mentioned their opinions about this topic. Ahmet indicated that “ religion is not effective in their lives but, I thought that all of thier life is religious. On the other hand, Ramazan added that:

Religion has not impact. I also think that we might misunderstand the Sheri'a in these countries. If there was a so hard religious law in these countries, then these students would not to be so different from our prediction. They can be influenced the free life of Cyprus but, they still didn't change.

Selin also said:

There is not so much effect of religion on social life. Religion isn't so much important in social life. If religion has so much effects in their countries, then we can see some sign of this impacts. They are not religious countries up to me.

As a result, the findings showed that, the perceptions of Turkish students were influenced by Islamic students regarding the effects of religion in their social life. All of them thought that Islamic countries are religion countries and religious law is dominant, all people have to obey these rules. But these opininons of Turkish students changed when they met theb Islamic students and they saw the social lives of these students in their college in North Cyprus.

### **Perception Changes of Turkish Students About Islamic Culture:**

This part refers to whether there is a changing or not in perceptions of Turkish students about Islamic countries. All participants centered three major changes: dressing style, effects of religion, and social life. The participant students indicated that there were important effects of Islamic students on the perceptions of them. Ahmet mentioned that “I supposed these countries as religious communities. But, they are like us, they wear like us, they fun, they travel, they are interested in scientific studies. In brief, they live like us. There isn't any difference”. Gizem indicated “they are also clubbable people. They aren't bigoted and conservative, but I didn't use to think so previously.

Merve said that:

I had some prejudices regarding their life styles, but there isn't so much bias now. They cooked and we ate together in their homes, I saw their homes and their special lives. There isn't any difference. I thought previously that they were uncivilized, and religion had a great impact. I saw here that they keep up to development of modern world.

Ramazan added that:

I saw here that they are also contemporary like us. They develop themselves in some fields. Especially, the Sheri'a country perception is completely mistaken about Iran.

Other participants mentioned similar statements about this topic. Additionally, Islamic students influence the

perceptions of Turkish students regard to culture of Islamic communities.

### **Contributions of Islamic Students On The Learning Experience of Turkish Students.**

Lastly, the participants indicated that there are some contributions of Islamic students to their experiences such as recognitions of different cultures, integrations between cultures, and developments of their aspects. Ahmet mentioned that he learnt different cultural traits from these students. Ayşe said that if she went to these areas next times, she would learn information from these friends because they would be helpful for her. Tuba indicated that she was developing her English skills thanks to speaking with her Islamic students. Nuri added that:

I am recognizing the world and I notice different cultures, and different life styles. Now, I can ably interpret the developments and the events in middle-east countries.

Zeynep said that:

I study in the Department of Psychology. I am learning here aspects, opinions of people who are from different cultures. Community psychology can differ from one to another. I have chance to observe these differences.

### **Conclusion and Discussion**

The effects of Islamic students on the perceptions of Turkish students regarding Islamic countries were evaluated in this study. The findings showed that the perceptions of respondents have been influenced by Islamic students. The perceptions of Turkish students about foreign language skills, positive sciences, role of the women, human rights, the effect of religion, dressing styles, social relations in Islamic communities changed when they recognized Islamic students in their college. Generally, Islamic country perception was also affected and changed.

According to the social identity theory(SIT), the quite handling of “us” and “they” classification could reveal bias between groups and cronyism, causing to battle and prejudice. Prejudice augments the social remoteness among the communities. According to news schedules on middle east countries, many communities hut unfavorable thoughts about muslims and arabs due to terrorism attacks. Also, many countries have bias toward these middle-east nations because, arab communities are governed by the Shariah. The findings of this study showed that Turkish students had some prejudices toward Islamic communities before recognizing their Islamic friends atthe college. These bias were removed by Islamic students thanks to interrelationships between Turkish and Islamic students. Especially, while Turkish students thought Islamic countries as underdeveloped, Islamic students were showed them that Islamic countries are also developing. This study contributes to assumptions of SIT.

On the other hand, according to Social Distance Concept(SDC) as the rate of comprehension and nearness that defines individual and social associations. This theory emphasized that the rate of sympathetic comprehension

between individuals and groups will conclude in either fondness or social aloofness. The findings of this study support the assumptions of SDC. The perceptions of Turkish students changed about Islamic cultures and life styles of people when they met with Islamic students and they could understand the traits of the Islamic countries according the findings.

Additionally, the findings indicated that the Islamic students have an important mission, because they can introduce their cultures, communities, and countries and they can destroy some prejudices which are relevant to their cultures. For instance, all Turkish students mentioned that there are great effects on their perceptions regarding Islamic countries such as language skills, dressing style, effects of religion, social life of Islamic people. Their perceptions were positively changed by Islamic students.

### **Implications**

The results obtained from this paper have important implications. The managers of college should pay attantion to integrations of students who are from different cultures. Therefore, the managers can increase the number of some social activities which provide the interrelationships of these students.

The governments should encourage students to study abroad, because these students introduce their cultures and they remove the prejuidces regarding their countries.

Thanks to these Islamic students, many bias are removed from the minds of Turkish people. These universities can contribute to development of understanding between Islamic and Turkish people. Hence, the administrators of universities in North Cyprus should augment their promotion and campaign to attract more students from Islamic countries.

### **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

There are some limitations of this study. One of them is sample of the study. This study was carried out with ten students at GAU and these students were selected with using the randomly sampling technique. Future studies can include other sample method and they can be carried out with more respondents.

Moreover, this study adopted the qualitative method as research procedure. Future research can use quantitative research method with more respondents.

Also, this study was carried out in North Cyprus that is a Small Island Development State. Thus, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to western countries and great states. Future reseacrh can be performed in western countries.

Lastly, this study adopts only effects of Islamic students as International students. Future research can examine the effects of different students who are from other nations such as Nigeria, Azerbaijan, and Pakistan.



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