

# International students in turkey: main problems related to poor academic performance

## Abstract

Every year many students leave their countries in order of experiencing life and study in another country. The length of these studies is different: Students that leave for undergraduate studies are obligated to stay at least 4 years in that particular country of choice; at least 2 years for master studies and at least 3 or 4 years for doctoral studies. If we assume that these students will finish all of their obligations on time, yet there is a lot of time to be spent in a foreign country, with different customs and tradition. During last couple of years, more than 500 students from Bosnia and Herzegovina left to Turkey for finishing undergraduate or graduate studies. Living in a different country for awhile is a great experience from which students can learn more than from any book or movie. However, after gaining the scholarships and the departure, students are facing difficulties which sometimes result as leaving everything and going back home. The purpose of the study is to provide an insight why do international students in Turkey often have poor academic performance.

**Keywords:** international students, turkey, academic challenges, separation, fear, failure, travel, academic achievement, academic performance

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## Opinion

Every year many students leave their countries in order of experiencing life and study in another country. The length of these studies is different: Students that leave for undergraduate studies are obligated to stay at least 4 years in that particular country of choice; at least 2 years for master studies and at least 3 or 4 years for doctoral studies. If we assume that these students will finish all of their obligations on time, yet there is a lot of time to be spent in a foreign country, with different customs and tradition.

During last couple of years, more than 500 students from Bosnia and Herzegovina left to Turkey for finishing undergraduate or graduate studies. Turkey offers nice scholarships which attract many students, for different reasons: some of them cannot afford the studies in their country, the others are interested in visiting and living in a foreign country, etc. After arriving in Turkey students are obligated to finish the course of Turkish language (9 months long). After this, they apply for universities (this is only for master and PhD studies-undergraduate students know their universities in advance) and wait for the reply to find out which university they won and in which town they will live during their studies.

Living in a different country for a while is a great experience from which students can learn more than from any book or movie. However after gaining the scholarships and the departure, students are facing difficulties which sometimes result as leaving everything and going back home. The purpose of the study is to provide an insight why do international students in Turkey often have poor academic performance.

During our stay in Turkey we interviewed 50 students from different cities of whom 20 were male (40%) and 30 (60%) were female. The largest number of students (50%) were undergraduate students (age 17-20) followed by those who were currently on their master studies (30%, age 22-28) and finally, 20% of PhD candidates (age 25-30) (Figure 1).

Students were asked how they perceive their life in Turkey. They reported that mainly they are satisfied, but there are some difficulties

which are making their studies hard to finish. These problems are not related to the type of study, they are related to them being foreigners in Turkey. Main problems that students from Bosnia and Herzegovina are facing are: Separation from family, friends and romantic partners, academic transfer issues and academic challenges and fear of failure.

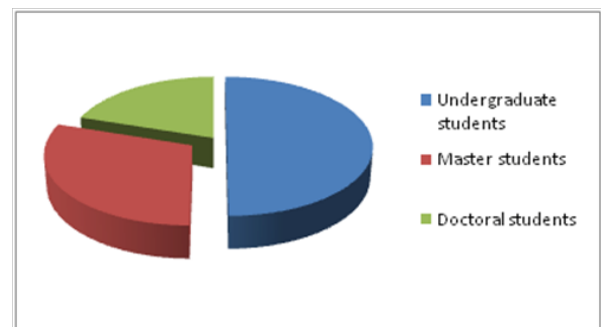


Figure 1 Participants in our study.

## Separation from family, friends and romantic partners

96% of the interviewed students, no matter of their age report that they miss their families and friends back in Bosnia and Herzegovina and they think it makes everything harder. 38% of them has a romantic partner in their home country. Because of that, they don't go out much and are not oriented in meeting new people, which leads to loneliness. They report that life in Bosnia and Herzegovina is more flexible and people put an effort to stay in touch with their friends and family. In Turkey, as a foreigners they hang out mostly with other students from the Balkan area. 22% of the students report that they feel lonely. Interviewed students are living and studying in different cities in Turkey (small and big ones). So, some of the students are very lonely in the town they are living in.

They perceive that students in bigger cities have better lives and more choices. The feeling of loneliness damages person's wellbeing. Human being is social and in a deep need for contact with other people. Students that live in small towns report that they miss speaking their

mother tongue that sometimes they don't speak in days because there is none to speak with. They feel alone and abandoned. On the other side, students living in Istanbul perceive that they cannot be alone and bored- there is a lot of things that one can do in order to feel better. They perceive that Istanbul has a lot to offer and they are mostly happy because they have the chance to live and study there. Most of the undergraduate students reported that living on their own and being independent is very good, but they miss everyday moments with their loved ones and the facilities they have back home. Sharing rooms with other students in dormitories and lack of privacy and space for learning leads to bad grades and the lack of self-confidence.

### Academic transfer issues and academic challenges

92% of students is studying in Turkish language. 4% is studying at private universities which official language is English. In their opinion, studying in Turkish is the biggest problem related to their universities. One year of studying Turkish language before starting the programme is not enough. They often feel like "they don't belong there", because they sit in class without understanding it. Consequently, they are not satisfied with their academic achievements, which leads to anxiety. Their academic performance is poor and they think it would be better in their homeland. 64% of them reports that teachers don't have understanding for them.

Students in master and doctoral programmes are facing an additional problem. As it was mentioned before, after completing the course of Turkish language, students continue with applying to master and PhD programmes. Many of them do not win the programme they are interested in.

"I applied to the best university in Turkey (in my opinion), for the master studies in Economy! I've been there, visited and talked to the professors. When I won it, I was the happiest person alive! I went to enroll for the programme- and I was shocked! I wasn't able to start with my classes. The reason were not my bad grades- Turkish Ministry of Education simply closed the programme without letting us know! Now I am forced to study something else, in a university I am not satisfied with, just because someone made a decision without consulting us- and they brought us here!"- says one of the students. 10 of 50 students are studying something completely different from their wishes.

### Fear of failure

Studying abroad mostly slows down the progress towards graduation. When students visit home and talk with their peers that have almost finished their studies, they are not sure if they made a good decision when they chose to study abroad. Students mostly perceive that they got the chance to study for free and that that is a chance they has to be used. 52% of them report that they often wish to leave their

studies and go back home, but they will never do it. So, they stay and face the difficulties because they don't want to dissapoint their families. They don't want to fail in finishing their studies in Turkey.

Money is also very important. Tickets are expensive, especially on holidays, for which students don't have the chance to visit home often. 68% of them perceive that, if they had the chance to go home more often, they would feel much better and more motivated for continuing the studies.

However, students report that if they had the chance to do it all over again, they would definitely do it. They think that they benefited from their studies in Turkey. They learned to be on their own, travelled and experienced new life. They've met new friends from all over the world. They became familiar with Turkish language, culture and customs. They learned more about themselves and their culture, too.

### Conclusion

Main problems that students from Bosnia and Herzegovina are facing during their studies in Turkey are: Separation from family, friends and romantic partners, academic transfer issues and academic challenges and fear of failure. It seems that separation from family, friends or romantic partners is the biggest problem for students. Due to lack of money and obligations at school, they don't have time to visit home often. That's why they often feel lonely and are not motivated for studies. The next big problem is academic transfer issues- students report that they have problems with Turkish language. Also, some of them didn't get the chance to start the programme they won, due to academic issues. Fear of failure is also leading to poor academic performance. Although they are sometimes not satisfied with their universities and lives in Turkey, students report that they will not give up because it would dissapoint their loved ones.

However, they think they did the right thing when they choose to study abroad. Students perceive that benefits from their life in Turkey are big: They have learned being on their own, they met friends from all over the world, travelled, learned a new language and experienced a completely different life.

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### Conflicts of interest

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